Qualitative Research

A Field Manual for Ministry Students

Timothy D. Lincoln

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BY TIMOTHY D. LINCOLN

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Preface

I BEGAN THINKING SERIOUSLY about writing a book about qualitative research several years ago. At that point in my career, I had conducted several research studies and taught research methods classes to dozens of Doctor of Ministry (DMin) students at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. I had given workshops about research design and program evaluation to librarians and administrators at theological schools. Because of my varied professional interests in libraries, theological education, and Christian ministry, I found myself frequently valuing ideas and techniques whose origin stories lie in fields like anthropology, library science, educational theory, and the sub-discipline of Christian thinking called practical theology. When I imported these tools into other contexts, I found that these techniques often were helpful and had not been thought of by persons whose training was more focused than mine.

Throughout my career as a theological educator, I have generally been the sole member of the faculty who ever took graduate-level courses in statistics, research design, or qualitative research. Working in the world of North American theological education, one of my challenges has been to learn how to translate social science jargon into words that my colleagues and students can digest. Of course, professional theologians have their own dialects of jargon but, when your world is mostly seminary faculty types, theological terminology is the lingua franca. The ways that scientists—or, God forbid, administrators—describe the world are simply tongues unknown. I have written this book because of my conclusion that theological education and ministry are improved by being in dialogue with social sciences, especially qualitative research.

Among my unwritten career goals, I have wanted to make DMin education better. I know all the jokes about DMin/demons, too. One of the challenges for DMin educators is that many students are committed, excellent pastors but have never been trained in "field work" in a

social science sense. They spent their time in seminary deepening their understanding of the Bible and Christian tradition and learning how to preach and lead congregations. Thus, while DMin students may feel comfortable with thinking theologically, they may feel less comfortable doing the kind of research described in this book. A recent committee organized by the Commission on Accrediting of ATS noted that "DMin students . . . often arrive with gaps in their preparation for field research and scholarly writing" (DMin Identity Peer Group Final Report, 5). The problem, of course, is that the capstone experience for DMin students is conducting a final project that uses social science methods.

Experience does not always lead to wisdom. Nevertheless, my experience as a researcher, teacher, administrator, and reader of the research of others led me to several conclusions about what constitutes good and bad qualitative research, especially research conducted at small scale—precisely the kind of qualitative research frequently conducted by ministers and seminary students. My experience has made me a fervent advocate for interdisciplinary approaches that honor the texture and complexity of our lives. In other words, I have opinions to share about how best to conduct qualitative research. I am grateful to Atla Open Press for the opportunity to put down in writing some of those opinions, along with techniques considered best practices by other qualitative researchers. Mistakes of fact and oversights in acknowledging the work of others are my fault.

I began writing the chapters that follow well before the arrival into the world of a novel coronavirus named SARS-CoV-2. This virus, the cause of the COVID-19 pandemic, has killed more than one and a half million people and changed everyday life for billions of people on earth. In response to the arrival of the virus in the United States, my own institution told staff to work from home as much as possible. Classes moved from face-to-face instruction to online in a matter of two weeks. In the United States, Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases became a folk hero (mostly). Video technology like Zoom became a lifeline and a source of dread. Because we are all critics and a little bored, in 2020 we entertained ourselves criticizing the background choices of our colleagues and news presenters that work from home. Under orders from government officials, millions of people stayed home. Many people of faith stopped going to services at their houses of worship. Tragically, people were unable to be at the bedside of loved ones who died from COVID-19. Pastor and other church leaders scramble to respond pastorally. Christian congregants that took comfort from the sharing of bread and wine in Holy Communion and the singing of liturgy found themselves experiencing "parking lot church" or various kinds of virtual worship on Facebook, Zoom, and other platforms.

And if a global pandemic was not enough, the killing of George Floyd, an African American man, by White police officers in Minneapolis re-ignited the Black Lives Matter movement. Renewed attention was paid to the death of Breonna Taylor, an African American woman in Louisville, and many others. Their deaths have been a catalyst for demands to reform policing of persons of African descent and for the removal of monuments celebrating slavery in the United States and the United Kingdom. My own church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), decided in 2019 to establish June 17th as "a day of repentance for the ELCA for the martyrdom of the Emanuel 9," who were murdered by a White Lutheran at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC in 2015 during a Bible study (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 2019). In 2020, in response to the murder of George Floyd and other acts of police violence against Blacks, the ELCA renewed its efforts to promote antiracism in a predominately White church. As a minister of the ELCA, I have been convicted by events to make halting attempts to move out of my comfort zones as a straight, White, bourgeois, tenured faculty member. I am working hard to stop pretending that racism is not my predicament. As African American activist Eldridge Cleaver said: If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.

The events of 2020 have changed this book in two ways. First, I have added more discussion about ways to conduct qualitative research without being physically proximate to interview participants. There are ways to conduct interviews via video technology that produce robust interactions with participants and therefore high-quality data. It's not a sin to use them. I am a strong proponent of doing what is possible rather than lamenting our inability to do the impossible. Going forward, qualitative researchers should be knowledgeable about the best tools and techniques available to engage in studies in ethical and safe ways, even when interactions are mediated by computers. In the pages that follow, I have tried to balance my discussion of qualitative research so that I do not use hypothetical examples drawn from the ongoing pandemic at every turn. At the same time, it is entirely possible that the new normal, the revised normal, or the socially distanced normal (whatever we are going to call it) will feature far less social intimacy than in the past, even after effective vaccines become available to the general public. As a person who turned 65 in 2020, I officially joined the ranks of those considered especially vulnerable to COVID-19. I am not a disinterested observer of the passage of this virus throughout the human population. Therefore, I've put it in the book.

Second, I have added more discussion about the reality of race, class, and gender to the text in my discussions of intersectionality and positionality than I originally intended. I am convinced that Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins's analytical insights about the complex nature of the person in society (intersectionality) is one of the key intellectual accomplishments of the late twentieth century. In a time of social turbulence caused by (among other things) ignoring the reality of race and the economic diminishment of most Americans ("the decline of the middle class"), I would be untrue to my values if I portrayed qualitative research as an aloof, sanitized endeavor or if I gave the impression that this work is something that only White people should do. Like our lives, qualitative research is messy.

If I ignored the complexities of intersectionality, I would also be doing a great disservice to my intended audience: students engaged in theological education in North America at the master's and Doctor of Ministry level. As reported to the Association of Theological Schools, enrollment at ATS member schools in the fall of 2019 was composed of students from a variety of racial or ethnic groups. Just under half of students identified themselves as White (49.7 percent). More than 12 percent identified as Black (12.5 percent). When we consider gender, approximately two out of three enrolled students were men (65.7 percent) and one out of three were women (34.3 percent).

There was a time when most seminary students enrolled at ATS schools were White men. That was not the case in 2019. Based on information reported to ATS, White men comprised 33.4 percent of enrollment in all programs (Association of Theological Schools 2019, Table 2.12-A). I very much doubt that the proportions of students at any one seminary reflect the binational totals that I've used to parse the ATS student world. My point (directed mostly, to be honest, at White men like me) is that attending to intersectionality is not a liberal plot about anything. On the contrary, attending to intersectionality is a respectful way to pay attention to the diversity of persons now in seminaries and in the communities served by seminary graduates.

I have done my best to use a conversational voice in this book. It is a textbook. I hope that most readers will use it in the company (perhaps virtual company) of other students who need to learn more about qualitative research. Many of my own theological and disciplinary commitments will shine through in the pages that follow. I have already named some of them. I have endeavored to create exercises and use examples that come from a variety of perspectives. For instance, some examples ask the reader to think as if they are "progressive" or "pro-life" or theologically "conservative." (I know: conservative Catholics and conservative Baptists differ mightily.) I want the book to find a readership that is broader than the

mainline Protestant tribe that is my everyday life. Examples of published research studies include a range of topics of concern to both more conservative and more progressive Christians.

Because I assume that readers of this book have little experience doing qualitative research, this book has many exercises. Students will gain the most benefit from the book by doing the exercises rather than skipping ahead to my discussion of them. According to an old joke, you get to Carnegie Hall by practice; you become a qualitative researcher the same way. Reading about coding text is as exciting as reading about proper hand position when playing the piano. Coding text will first feel like playing scales and, over time, like actual music. It is worth the effort, but it takes practice.

Let me explain the layout of the book.

- Exercises are printed in bold text, indented, in a different font to draw the eye, like this:

  Exercise. If I call something an exercise, I discuss what I think are good answers in the body of the text. I also expect the reader to make a good faith effort at completing the exercise before reading my commentary.

- Thought Problems are also printed in bold text, indented, in a different font from the main text, thus:

  Thought Problem. The difference between an exercise and a thought problem is that I discuss answers to exercises but I don't explicitly discuss the answers to thought problems. I leave that work to you.

- **Examples.** Occasionally I will set off a particularly striking example in bold, indented text using the same font as exercises and thought problems.

- Some technical terms are bolded and in italics (thus: ***technical term***) in the main text the first time that they are introduced. You may conveniently find short discussions of these terms in the glossary.

Here is how I have organized the book. Part 1 consists of two chapters. In chapter 1, I discuss the early stages of a qualitative research project. I discuss what qualitative research is and how it relates to practical theology. In chapter 2, I discuss research ethics. Good ethical practices should govern all qualitative research. Part 2 also consists of two chapters which discuss initial tasks of finding a topic, writing research questions, choosing an overall approach, and inviting participants (chapters 3 and 4).

Part 3, the middle of the book, discusses various techniques for gathering data. I spend a lot of time discussing interviewing (chapter 5), both interviewing individuals and groups. In chapter 6, I discuss the nerdy and important problems associated with writing good survey questions and using descriptive statistics. In chapter 7, I discuss observation and a grab bag of other techniques called mixed methods.

Part 4 is about working with data. Chapter 8 discusses analysis (what the data say) and chapter 9 pushes deeper into possible explanations (i.e., what the data mean). In chapter 10, I talk about writing reports about research studies. Finally, the last chapter discusses the distinctive kind of qualitative research done by Doctor of Ministry students—the dreaded final project. Spoiler alert: DMin students who want to learn the specifics of doing research can't simply skip to chapter 10; they will need to work through the entire book to understand the arc of the research enterprise.

To make this book as useful as possible, appendices include sample boilerplate texts for consent forms and examples of guided imagery for use in focus groups. I have also created a databank of anonymous interview data so that students can practice coding them.

So, let's begin.

PART 1

Foundations

Part 1 discusses foundational concepts governing qualitative research. These include:

- The conceptual difference between qualitative research and quantitative research
- How qualitative research can serve practical theology
- The importance of honoring difference among persons
- Ethical requirements of qualitative research studies, including informed consent

CHAPTER 1

What Is Qualitative Research?

I love Paris. It's so French.

– Cyndi Lauper, musician

Conscious experience is a widespread phenomenon. . . . [T]he essence of the belief that bats have experience is that there is something like to be a bat.

– Thomas Nagel, philosopher (Nagel 1974)

THIS TEXTBOOK IS about qualitative research—a set of techniques for social science inquiry that has undergone a renaissance in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Simply put, qualitative research is the systematic exploration of human experience in a specific setting using methods that honor human particularity and voice. ***Qualitative research*** stands in contrast to the other primary research approach used by social scientists, ***quantitative research***, for three reasons.

First, qualitative research is interested above all in the texture of human experience: the Eiffel Tower, baguettes, and the other subtle things that make Paris so French. The qualitative research techniques detailed in this book (interviews, surveys, observation, etc.) are in service of teasing out the answer to the tantalizing question, "What is it like?" In everyday usage, we talk about the quality of a coffee maker or a car, or the qualities that a person exhibits. When John Calvin famously asked 'what kind of God is God? (*Institutes* 3.2.6), in Latin, he was asking *Qualis deus sit?* The qualities of human experience, according to qualitative researchers, can be described with rigor even though they cannot be weighed and measured like a child visiting her doctor for a school checkup. As we shall see, qualitative research commonly looks for themes voiced by participants in a research study. Qualitative research wants to discover both the variety of viewpoints expressed and which are expressed by a majority of study participants. If there are a variety of ways to be a bat, a Baptist from Nashville, or a Parisian—well, qualitative research wants to learn more about them.

Second, qualitative research is modest. Some practitioners of social science want to discover underlying mechanisms (laws) that govern human behavior in general, much in the same way that chemists want to discover the regularities in how the elements interact. For instance, sociologist Émile Durkheim (1995) contended that, based on his analysis of the religious practices of aboriginal people in Australia, the phenomenon of religion could be explained as group fluorescence. According to Durkheim, even though the individuals taking part in traditional religious rites (e.g., dances) thought that they were communing with their ancestors and gods, the expert using a scientific method was able to dig beneath the appearance of things to discover a deeper truth: the engine of religion is the human satisfaction that

derives from taking part in a common set of rituals and practices. In contrast to quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers are content to provide a detailed description and offer explanations that fit a single setting such as a congregation or a specific group of people within the congregation. As we shall discover, such an explanation is called a grounded theory. This modesty of purpose is consistent with qualitative research's interest in variation and particular experiences.

Third and finally, qualitative research generally does not use inferential statistical methods used by some social scientists. Bear with me for a brief excursus about statistics. Two branches of statistics are descriptive and inferential. An example of ***descriptive statistics*** is voting in an election. The results of an election should accurately describe (count) all valid votes cast. In a two-person race, barring a flat-out tie, the results determine an undisputable winner. All of the data (votes) are perfectly analyzed simply by counting accurately. Inferential statistics, by contrast, use a random sample of a group and then draw conclusions (inferences) about what would be true if it were possible to engage every person in that group. Based on more than one hundred years of experience, it is clear that these kinds of inferences are accurate, within identifiable margins of error. There are many virtues to inferential statistical methods, especially when you want to learn about the opinions of a large group (e.g., all of the likely voters in your state's Republican Party primary). You are no doubt familiar with polling. The whole point of asking a random sample of people their opinions (i.e., conducting a poll) is so that researchers can reliably estimate (not guess!) what the result would be if it were possible to ask the same question of every person of interest (e.g., all Republicans registered to vote in Ohio). Back to my main point, because qualitative research does not use ***random sampling*** and inferential statistics, a ministry student who wants to conduct a small study using qualitative research need not feel remorseful that she was not a math major in college. Qualitative research uses ***purposive sampling*** (much more about that in chapter 4). Qualitative research has little interest in saying that what is true in one research setting (my Lutheran congregation) is also going to be the case in others (most other Lutheran congregations in the United States). If study findings appear to resonate with other people in other settings, that is wonderful. But a qualitative research study rooted in one research setting (often called a case study) has its own rigor and integrity.

In short, qualitative research values the textures of human experience, is modest in its claims, and doesn't draw conclusions from a few cases about what might be generally true.

To show how qualitative research characteristics differ from quantitative research in the social sciences, I've summarized them in the table below.

Table 1.1 — Qualitative Research vs. Quantitative Research

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Values subtle textures of human experience and first-person narratives	Values social factors and forces underlying experience
Describes cases or micro-cultures in detail without positing laws of human behavior	Wants to discover mechanisms and generally true "laws" based on evidence
Uses descriptive statistical methods to describe participants and findings of study	Uses inferential statistical methods to generalize results to larger population

Table 1.1 — Qualitative Research vs. Quantitative Research

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Typical qualitative research sentence: "Participants voiced two main themes about their experience of children's sermons: joy at seeing children in church and relief at hearing spiritual truths in plain language."	Typical quantitative research sentence: "Factors influencing whether or not participants found children's sermons edifying included regularity of worship attendance in childhood and level of activity in the congregation."

Let's see how these differences in approach look in more detail by examining two studies about how sermons are heard. William M. Newman and Stuart A. Wright conducted a study about the effect of sermons on their intended audiences and the "kinds of social variables [that] explain the differential effects of sermons on laypersons" (Newman and Wright 1980, 54). These researchers administered a questionnaire about the effectiveness of sermons to 537 lay Catholics. Respondents answered 58 items such as "Do sermons provide you with a sense of God's love?" (Newman and Wright, 56). The researchers then used the statistical method of multiple regression to draw conclusions about the relative strength of variables such as level of education and involvement in parish activities. (Multiple regression is a method of statistical reasoning that accounts for how changes in more than one variable accurately predicts a change in another variable. For instance, changes in access to good food and changes to access to medical care might both influence someone's general state of health.) They found that "people with higher levels of education are least likely to be influenced by sermons" but those who are highly involved in church life are more likely to report that sermons impact them than those with little involvement (Newman and Wright, 57). Other social factors such as age, gender, and whether or not participants had attended Catholic schools were not statistically important. In other words, whether a participant was a man or a woman did not appear to influence how an individual is moved (or not moved) by hearing sermons. This study shows several standard characteristics of quantitative research. Newman and Wright used inferential statistical methods (multiple regression) to show that their conclusions were unlikely to be due to chance. The researchers interpreted findings in terms of the social characteristics of respondents (variables or factors).

By contrast, consider a Doctor of Ministry final project by Ralph Hawkins about how church members hear sermons (Hawkins 2014). Using interactive qualitative analysis (Northcutt and McCoy 2004), the researcher led a focus group of fifteen church members to generate key themes centered on the prompt "tell me about hearing sermons." The group generated eight themes, including delivery, relevance, Scripture, and encounter. Based on the focus group results, he then interviewed twenty-two individuals to flesh out the specifics of each theme. Each theme identified by the focus group became an open-ended interview question, such as "The focus group identified the theme of encounter, defined as ways that sermons may challenge hearers, give them a new viewpoint, or make them think. Tell me about the encounter of sermons" (Hawkins 2014, 64). In his project report, Rev. Hawkins reported subthemes within the eight themes. For instance, he found three subthemes under the broader theme of relevance: focusing on the needs of the world, connecting to the hearer's personal life, and connecting hearers to larger theological ideas (68). He also reported examples of interview responses using direct quotations. For instance, one respondent spoke to the importance of hearing relevant sermons by saying "Every now and then there's a sermon that is absolutely a directed laser pointer right at your heart. But other times . . . the relevance is just more the reminder of who God is, what his [sic] plan looks like for human

beings" (77). Hawkins's work is firmly grounded in qualitative research approaches. His approach was not concerned with *why* respondents heard sermons in certain ways based on social characteristics. Instead, he wanted to achieve a better understanding of what the experience of hearing sermons is like. He made no claims that the views of those interviewed in one Presbyterian congregation are likely to be the same as those of American Presbyterians in general.

To sum up, these two examples demonstrate that quantitative approaches traditionally want to get at mechanisms to explain variations in a phenomenon, such as the elements of a person's background that do (and don't) impact how they respond to sermons. By contrast, qualitative approaches lie closer to experience—in this case, the experience of hearing sermons in one congregation. The minister-researcher used a focus group and individual interviews to collect data, which he then made sense of by closely reading interview transcripts (= ***data analysis*** or ***coding***). Hawkins reported the frequency of subthemes and summarized the background of respondents but did not make an argument about causes or mechanisms in the way that Newman and Wright did in their study.

This section introduced qualitative research as focused on human experience, making modest claims for its findings rather than theory building, and having its own set of analytical tools. These characteristics distinguish it from the methods and interests of quantitative research. The next section puts qualitative research into conversation with a growing discipline in theology, practical theology.

> **Thought Problem** How would you explain the differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches in a sentence or two?

Qualitative Research and Practical Theology: Putting Some of My Theological Cards on the Table

Qualitative research has gotten a lot of attention from practical theologians. Like qualitative researchers, the discipline of ***practical theology*** focuses on "human experience and its desire to reflect theologically on that experience" (Swinton and Mowat 2006, v). Because practical theology celebrates the particularity of human experience, the field naturally gives birth to focused studies of specific groups of persons. For instance, Ackermann and Boris-Storm (1998) edited a volume discussing practical theology from feminist viewpoints. It contained contributions from feminist practical theologians from Africa, Europe, and North America. Black practical theologians conduct research "located within social, religious, and cultural contexts that privilege black experience" (Andrews and Smith 2015, 3). Catholic and Protestant theologians engage in practical theology (Wolfteich 2016). Practical theologians study the experiences of immigrant communities (Hwang 2020, Masango and Olisa 2019, Reyes 2018).

In other words, qualitative research provides a set of tools for helping a researcher or practical theologian "get at" the human experience in respectful and systematic ways. Interrogating experience is a prerequisite for theological reflection about experience. It is only fair to readers that I put some of my own theological cards on the table that relate to qualitative research. It isn't necessary for you to agree with them to benefit from this book, but you will better understand some of the comments if you know my thinking in advance. Briefly put, I think that you and I both use a theological method that, in Christian parlance, could be called Wesleyan and Tillichean. (And I say this as a card-carrying Lutheran.) While I'll

be using terms from the Christian tradition to describe various elements of this approach, its basic structure is applicable to many religions that value both a tradition of revelation (however understood) and the exercise of human reason in community.

Practical Theology à la the Wesleyan Quadrilateral

My way of doing theology is Wesleyan in the sense of the ***Wesleyan quadrilateral*** of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience (Campbell 1991, Outler 1991, Thorsen 1990). Let's work through the four parts of the quadrilateral. First: scripture. Many religious communities have a text (or texts) considered central to their faith, whether they think of such scripture as the verbally inspired Word of God (in Christian terms, a "high" doctrine of biblical authority), the norm for doctrines and ethics (a standard understanding in Reformed and Lutheran circles, for instance), or a sometimes comforting, sometimes puzzling library of the origins of the tradition and its community. Though their terminology may differ (especially in traditions that are primarily oral), I contend that almost everyone deals with "scripture" (somehow!) as they do theology.

Second: tradition. We also attend to tradition as we engage the theological task. Tradition refers to a history of interpretation, customary practices, and "the way that we've always done it." The specific traditions to which we attend vary widely. As a Lutheran, I am under an obligation to relate my own theological notions to the Lutheran confessions, especially the Augsburg Confession. Catholics attend to a rich theological tradition more broadly and to the official teachings of the magisterium in particular. Muslims follow the guidance of various schools (madhabs) of Islamic jurisprudence. What counts as tradition in a high-church Episcopal congregation is different from what counts in low-church congregations, and tradition may mean something different in a Reform synagogue than it does in an Orthodox one. One of the favorite theological slogans of my Presbyterian colleagues is: *semper reformanda*—the idea that the church is always in need of being reformed, and that a Christian can only call the church to account for failing to live up to its calling by paying attention to the past, to tradition. In any religious community, attending to the rich legacy of tradition is, at heart, simply noticing that believers have been struggling to be faithful for a long time. I attend to tradition because I am aware that I have something to gain by listening to the voices of believers throughout history.

Third: reason. My theological forebear, Martin Luther, called reason a lot of bad names and said that it could not be trusted (Luther 1958, Luther 1972, 174–5). That didn't stop him from making several theological arguments about why the church needed to be reformed and how those needed changes related both to tradition (especially, for Luther, the writings of St. Augustine) and the Bible. Many a sermon preached by a minister with a high doctrine of scripture has woven together multiple scripture passages to make a point. In other words, she was constructing an argument. Thus, she used reason. Every theologian does.

Fourth: experience. In the Wesleyan quadrilateral, experience refers to an individual's faith journey, informed by scripture. Being faithful is not simply a matter of giving cognitive assent to orthodox doctrines; it is also felt and lived out by individuals. This aspect of the theological enterprise opens the way for honoring variation in the experiences of believers who came to faith in different ways in different cultural contexts. The faith experiences of emerging adults in the Pacific northwest (Drovdahl and Keuss 2020) are not the same as the Christian experience of Latino Mennonites (Hinojosa 2014) or of African American converts to the Catholic Church (Moore 2010). In my view, theological conversations have become richer because religious communities and professional theologians welcome women and men from around the world to the party.

One of the expansive things about the Wesleyan quadrilateral is that it doesn't specify the proportions of the components in the theological recipe. Your theological reflection might be thoroughly rooted in scripture and make almost no appeal to tradition. Yet you would also be engaging the mind and heart (thus, reason and experience), too. Progressive theological movements are often so unsettling because they bring to bear the experiences of previously erased or silent groups of believers into public conversations. Once a new set of experience is brought to bear, tradition, reason, and even scripture appears in a new light.

The point of the quadrilateral is to recognize descriptively that we all honor or wrestle with scripture, employ some kind of logic (reason), remember what others have said and believed (tradition), and know our own faith journey (experience).

Practical Theology as Correlation: Tillich and His Children

What the quadrilateral says in terms of individual believers, Paul Tillich's hermeneutical circle, I think, says in the coded language of his systematic theology (Tillich 1951, 3–68). Tillich argues that theology always engages human culture and God's revelation. This approach to theology is called ***correlation***. Good preaching, good pastoral care, or good witness to justice in the world always require starting with human culture (which poses existential questions) and then turns for answers to revelation. The form of the questions changes over time and within different cultures. Fundamental questions of guilt and meaning were posed differently by Martin Luther in sixteenth-century Germany and by Americans living in gray suburbias in the 1950s. For Tillicheans, these questions ultimately receive the same answer from divine revelation: God accepts us. This is Tillich's mid-twentieth-century way of talking about salvation. Because his approach takes culture (read: lived human experience) so seriously, some critics understood him to be an arch-liberal who let contemporary problems set the agenda for theology. Others understood him to be an arch-conservative in liberal clothing, like a long-haired 1960s priest who wore bell bottoms but also believed in papal infallibility (Finstuen 2009; Re Manning and Shearn 2018). Tillich was conservative in that he thought that revelation provides the answers to the questions posed by culture.

Just as the Wesleyan quadrilateral doesn't specify the precise mix of its four essential ingredients, Tillich's method of correlation is not a theological machine that takes uniform input and creates homogeneous outputs. You and I might diagnose the great problems of our time differently. And even when we agreed on the great questions faced in our culture, we might disagree about how to relate revelation to them in evangelistic, pastoral, or justice-serving ways. Yet, I think that all theologians and pastors ride around the hermeneutical cycle of culture-based questions leading to revelation-based answers. The table below suggests one way of mapping the elements of the Wesleyan quadrilateral to Tillich's way of correlating human problems to revelation.

Table 1.2 — Squaring the Hermeneutical Circle: How We Do Practical Theology

Culture >	< Christian Revelation
Questions of meaning shaped by:	Intelligible answers shaped by the questions derived from:
Reason	Scripture
Experience	Tradition

The left-hand column of the table focuses on the contemporary situation. In our contemporary culture (which, as we will see below, is perhaps better described as a web of microcultures), our experiences and reason pose questions of meaning about human life and the life of the planet. Such questions are correlated to revelation. Scripture and tradition are sources of deep wisdom which, when put into conversation with culture, help theologians to offer intelligible answers to the contemporary situation in languages that are intelligible to us. Although I have placed reason and experience in the left-hand column, a classic Wesleyan might move experience to the right-hand column, since experience refers to my own experience of grace. The table might be misleading because the line between culture and revelation is porous. In practice, the human reason that I employ when reading scripture seems very much to be of a piece to the human reason that I employ when choosing a neighborhood to live in. Tillich's system is frequently called a hermeneutical circle because it only makes sense as a dynamic system. Before proceeding, I want to acknowledge another level of subtlety in the method of correlation. As I have described it, we can feel confident that revelation gives robust answers to problems posed by culture. More recent versions of the method (such as Tracy 1975) frequently affirm "critical correlation." Proponents of critical correlation argue that sometimes it is necessary for culture to challenge tradition and scripture and that believers may, in effect, reform their understanding of revelation.

My purposes in sharing this theological prologue are descriptive and formal. The most conservative Christian who holds a high doctrine of scripture and the work of Christ and a self-identified progressive Christian who tends to think that living faithfully in this life is so important that talk about the life everlasting is beside the point use the same formal theological method—a method with parallels in many other traditions as well. (I will be using Christian terminology throughout this work, reflecting my own positionality, but I invite non-Christian readers to mentally substitute terms from their own traditions that may be more appropriate while reading.) All of us are doing the Tillichean two-step while the band plays a Wesleyan tune. Because I think we are all Wesleyan and we are all Tillichean when it comes to theological method, I think that qualitative research makes good sense. I want us to take human experience seriously. That's saying the same thing as I want us to attend to lived cultural experiences of particular women and men. Good research methods can help us to be better listeners to others and, ultimately, better practitioners of theological reflection. Qualitative research is a welcome set of tools in the service of practical theology.

Positionality and Intersectionality: Who is the Researcher? Who are Participants?

In quantitative research, a high value is placed on objectivity. Quantitative methods attempt to be neutral so that findings are, well, factual. When I go to have my annual physical, how much I weigh should not depend on which nurse moves the slider along the scale. If the tool is working properly and the operator of the tool is competent, my weight will (alas) be what it is regardless of who happened to take the measurement. By contrast, qualitative research recognizes that who the researcher herself is makes a difference. Qualitative research scholars use several different ways of talking about who a researcher is in relationship to study participants. Concepts like bias, White privilege, expert, participant, and observer, point to ways that who you are as a researcher matters (Iversen and Jónsdóttir 2018, Saad 2020, Takyi 2015). To begin thinking about the relationship between a researcher and participants in a qualitative research study, consider the following exercise.

Exercise: Just Visiting Your worship professor requires you to attend a worship service in a tradition other than your own. You are supposed to identify yourself to the minister or worship leaders before the service, then be part of the congregation. You are instructed to "blend in" as best you can and refrain from taking notes until afterwards. You then will write a brief report on the assignment. How will your background affect how you experience worship in a "strange" setting?

Who you are could make a lot of difference in how you experience your visit. If, like me, you happen to be an older White guy, you might blend in quite well if you visit a church with White members. But a White Orthodox Christian experiencing a "cowboy church" service might feel like a fish out of water even though everyone present is White (Dallam 2018). A White male might attract attention from other worshippers if he chose to visit an African Methodist Episcopal Church service. If you are an African American and grew up in a Black evangelical church, you might feel more comfortable visiting a majority White Baptist church than if you attended a Catholic service (whether in English or Spanish and regardless of the number of Black and White persons present). Your awareness of feeling comfortable or uncomfortable might come from how others treat you (welcoming smiles? frowns? indifference?). You might also feel awkward if a "stage direction" is announced that makes no sense to you. For instance, a worship leader might say "Let us pass the peace" or "the acolytes will now receive the offering." These directions are stated in coded language. After the service, as you try to write down notes, you may only be able to remember a few specific details but have a strong sense of the mood of your experience. Now further imagine that cameras in the church were also making a visual and sound recording of the same service that you attended. The machines would have no access to the wealth of perceptions (and, perhaps, confusion) that you had as a specific person in attendance even though the equipment captured a record of what happened and what participants looked like. Who you are as a researcher matters in qualitative research. The general term for this facet of qualitative research is positionality.

Defining Positionality

I define positionality as the researcher's relationship with study participants. My thinking about positionality has been greatly influenced by Northcutt and McCoy's (2004, 70–2, 396–402) understandings of the power that researchers have and the particular viewpoints that participants in a study have with respect to the object of study. As the discussion below will make clear, positionality is a particular form of intersectionality.

Key factors that influence positionality are:

- **Economic status.** Access to certain kinds of privileges correlates to having more or less money (Piketty 2014). The children of "the one percent" rarely work two jobs to pay their college tuition. My working-class childhood gave me attitudes about money, work, and recreation that have stuck with me throughout my life. It is clear that one's economic status is an important factor in determining who one is and how one moves in the world.
- **Cultural commitments.** Twenty-first-century America is home to a stunning variety of political and cultural opinions. A recent immigrant commonly feels a dual commitment to their country of birth and their country of residence (Ruth and Estrada 2019; Verkuyten, Wiley, Deaux, and Fleischmann 2019; Wiley, Fleischmann, Deaux, and Verkuyten 2019). A person may have one foot in Mexico and another in Texas,

or one foot in Toronto and the other in Jamaica. As I write this chapter during an American presidential election, the media in the United States are rediscovering that "Latinos" or "Hispanics" are not a homogeneous voting bloc. Immigrants from Cuba (and their children) or Venezuela may trend politically more conservative than Mexican Americans in Texas or Puerto Ricans living in New York. To put it another way, "The term Hispanic spans diverse national origins, years in the United States that range from several centuries in the case of New Mexico's Hispano population to very recent immigrants, and a multitude of racialized identifications" (Lukinbeal, Price, and Buell 2012, 110).

- **Religious commitments.** Historically, individuals sharing common understandings of God and human life have grouped themselves into affiliative groups such as congregations and groups of congregations (denominations or entirely different religions). Readers of this book have, I trust, been trained to make nuanced judgements about religious commitments and to accurately speak about their own expression of faith. As you read this book, I challenge you to become aware of the importance of other factors in your identity and the identity of those whom you will work with as study participants.
- **Phenotype.** Phenotype refers to the way that our bodies look, including skin color, hair color and texture, height, and weight (Hendry and Underdown 2012, 13). Phenotype is the result of our genetic make-up, the environment, and the opportunities available to us. People are frequently treated differently by others depending on their physical appearance.
- **Sex, gender, and sexual orientation.** You most likely identify yourself at the intersection of multiple identities, such as lesbian woman or straight man (Evans 2006). Because each of us is gendered, we also have been shaped by expectations, privileges, or limitations that our society places on persons who are women or men or transgendered.
- **Age.** How old or young someone is creates genuine boundaries of personal experience. Appearing old may evoke shows of respect and deference on the part of others. Appearing young may evoke responses (wanted or unwanted) from others (Root 2017, Sung, Kim, and Torres-Gil 2010). Older people are burdened by memories and habits in ways that younger people are not.
- **Autobiography.** Even though you share much in common with someone of the same age, class, phenotype, and gender, you have a distinctive personal history. Many of us think of this as "the real me." Even in an age of sharing personal information and experiences via social media, much of the real me is known only to close friends, myself, and God. Paradoxically, even my close friends may see me in ways that I am not aware of (Luft and Ingram 1955).

That's quite a list of factors. Its complexity explains why it might be difficult to respond to an apparently simple question like "tell me a little bit about yourself." In scholarly literature, a term coming into use to sum up all of these characteristics about a person is ***intersectionality***, a powerful analytic tool coined by Black feminist scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw 1991) and Patricia Hill Collins (Hill Collins 1991; Hill Collins and Bilge 2016). Intersectionality notes that a single person is simultaneously a member of a certain social class, age group, and political persuasion. Intersectionality "highlights the need to

account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (Crenshaw 1991, 1245). In American culture, the intersection of these multiple identities for persons of color and women became the site for oppression. Intersectionality helps us name the complexity of our social relationships and identities. Several individuals who are "the same" because, for instance, they are all married women in their thirties may be "quite different" from each other as well. One is the vice president of a bank, another stays at home with her children, a third is a soldier. Moreover, persons are not some fractional mixture of various attributes. For instance, I am not 40 percent White, 25 percent Lutheran, and ten percent an aging baby boomer. I am all of these things simultaneously. Just as Martin Luther contended that a Christian is a set of paradoxes (*simul justus et peccator*; lord of all/servant of all), the concept of intersectionality asserts that every individual is socially and psychologically complex.

In a given setting, some features of my intersectionality may fade into the background and others come to the fore. For instance, when I am at church on Sunday mornings, the fact that I am one of many Lutherans fades into the background of my experience. The fact that I look a certain way (phenotype and age, which in my case means little old bearded White man) affects how little kids react to me but is mostly unremarkable otherwise. I'm White, and so are most other congregants. My social class and level of education aren't a big deal, either. In my congregation, the vast majority of people are middle class and highly educated. My personal history affects my interactions with people. Some are my friends. Because I am a clergyman, some people address me as Pastor Tim. By contrast, if I attend an interfaith event, the fact that I am a Christian cleric and White may come to the fore (at least in my own mind) as I relate to Muslims, Jews, and Sikhs who may not look like me and who hold different religious commitments than I do.

Some readers of this book may consider that certain parts of our intersectionality are caused by nature or God's design (e.g., the color of one's eyes) while others are cultural accidents. Had I been born in Novosibirsk instead of Nebraska, I would not speak English as my mother tongue. Some may find certain ways in which persons express their identity to be odd or not in keeping with God's desires for human community. Nevertheless, qualitative researchers take seriously what others say about themselves and what the researcher carefully observes about the microcultures that they study. To repeat, the entire point of qualitative research is curious engagement with the subtle textures of human experience. Qualitative researchers learn how to set aside their own opinions so that they can attend to the experiences of others.

Exercise: Positionality and Intersectionality Jot down some facts about yourself using the list of factors below. With a partner, compare notes. How does the way that you think about yourself compare with what your partner knows about you? Discuss the idea of intersectionality. Does it make sense to you?

- Economic status
- Cultural commitments
- Religious commitments
- Phenotype
- Gender
- Age

As I write this chapter, I am aware that part of my own economic status is "employed" as opposed to unemployed or furloughed. I am also aware of how easily people can lose their jobs. Culturally, I was raised in Minnesota but went to divinity school in the Northeast. As an adult, I have lived in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, and Texas. I listen to my local public radio station and a classical music station. I am a Lutheran and politically in the middle. (Sometimes I feel like the only one who is.) I am also a straight White male, a married person, a parent, a grandparent, and a senior citizen. Because of the intended audience for this book, I hope that many people reading these pages will be unlike me in many respects. I would expect that to be the case because our identities are shaped by economic forces, technological advances (from steam engines to microchips) and cultural movements (such as the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment, colonialism, and anticolonialism) that no living person initiated.

The concept of intersectionality is helpful because it takes all these parts of personal identity seriously. As qualitative researchers, you will meet individuals who (just like you and me) generally act on the basis that the real world is the one that I see outside of my window and that the society in general is mostly like the small social group with which I interact. As you learn about the everyday lives of persons, the concept of intersectionality becomes helpful as you ponder the meanings in your observations, interviews, and survey results.

Positionality and the Qualitative Researcher

As the previous exercise highlights, intersectionality is at play in each of us. This fact has tremendous implications for the conduct of qualitative research. You will bring to bear "who you are" in all facets into the research process, from picking what to study to how you are able to recruit participants and how you analyze findings. It is important, therefore, for qualitative researchers to be self-aware as well as being respectful to participants. As a qualitative researcher, you also will be marked by three other factors which shape your relationship to your study participants:

- **Outsider.** Unless you are conducting a study with people whom you already know (as Doctor of Ministry students frequently do), when conducting a qualitative study, you will be like a guest at a family meal. Your outsider status is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, you will need to establish trust with your study participants. It takes time to establish this kind of rapport. On the other hand, as an outsider you see your participants with fresh eyes. You are in the position to ask "why" questions with truthful naiveté. As odd as it may sound, ignorance can be a wonderful starting point for qualitative research. In anthropology, it was assumed that a researcher would be studying social groups that, in many ways, were not like the researchers. In the classic ethnographic studies of two seminaries, *Being There*, the research team of four had the liberal Protestants conduct field work at the conservative evangelical school. The evangelical researchers observed the liberal school. Why? "We made these assignments on the assumption that we would approach our respective institutions as "foreign" territory in which observed differences from our backgrounds would stand out in greater relief" (Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and Marler 1997, 7).
- **Expert.** Not only will you be an outsider, but you will be an expert. Study participants will notice the formality of your approach (signing consent forms, using a recording device, taking notes). They may ask you questions about the reason for your study and why you selected them. Later I will suggest in detail why "expert" may not

be the best way for you to think about your role as a collector of qualitative data. For now, it is important to note that researchers hold a great deal of power relative to all aspects of a study and that your participants will be aware of that power. Because you are perceived as an expert, some people may want to take part in your study; others may be suspicious of you.

- **Guest.** Unless you do research about the congregation that you are affiliated with, when doing a qualitative research study, the researcher is an outsider who is being shown hospitality by those she studies. In other words, she is a guest. Constantly reminding oneself that you are a guest is a necessary and effective antidote to researcher hubris.

A key point about positionality is that your research will be affected by who you are and by who your research participants are. As a general rule, having several of the same characteristics as your study participants enables the researcher to conduct interviews and gather other kinds of data with less social friction. It would probably be easier for an African American female colleague of mine to design and execute a qualitative research study whose participants were African American women than it would be for me.

Positionality refers not only to the differences and similarities between a researcher and her study participants, but to the researcher's *role*. The researcher is working on a specific task (the study) and is interested in study participants primarily (this is embarrassing to say) because participants have something to contribute to the study. The researcher-participant relationship gives the researcher permission to do certain things but not others. In a well-designed study, participants are not surprised by what the researcher asks them to do because they understand their role. Doing qualitative research in one's own congregation, as DMin students frequently do, poses distinctive challenges because of the tension between the role of researcher and that of a religious leader. Sensing (2011, 42–3) argues that, when such conflicts arise, the DMin student should err on the side of preserving a good pastoral relationship even at the expense of the quality of the project. To use current parlance, a researcher needs to stay in her lane.

In this section, I've talked a lot about the person of the researcher and said very little about study participants. This choice shows something important about the research process. The initiative for most qualitative research studies comes from the scholarly community, leaders in a denomination, or your interest. Scholars, leaders, and researchers want to learn more about a common practice (e.g., raising money to support the work of a congregation) or address a problem (e.g., why do younger church members contribute less money than older church members?) using qualitative research methods. Researchers pick study participants. I will say more about treating study participants fairly in chapter 2. The specific religious and cultural attitudes of study participants are key factors in a qualitative research study. Northcutt and McCoy (2004, 70–2, 396-402) stress that these specific attributes provide the shared viewpoint needed for a researcher to ask coherent questions (and receive intelligible answers) about a topic of research interest.

Qualitative Research from 50,000 Feet

Having talked about the relationship between practical theology and qualitative research and the concept of positionality, it's time to provide an overview of qualitative research. Succeeding chapters will discuss qualitative research in detail. At this point, I will lay out

the qualitative research process and the standard features of a scholarly article reporting on qualitative research findings, often called, with ironic understatement, "the write-up." You should see clear parallels between the stages of qualitative research and the finished write-up. If you read later chapters of this book and feel confused, I encourage you to come back to this section to figure out how a specific qualitative research task fits into the overall design of a qualitative research study.

Overview

When viewed from on high, the qualitative research process involves ten steps. The table below names them in order and gives a succinct definition. I'll make a few comments to explain some of the technical jargon.

Table 1.3 — The Qualitative Research Process

Topic selection	I determine what I want to study.
Literature review	I read what others have written about my area of research.
Research questions; hypotheses	I decide on specific aspects of my topic to collect data about. I may decide to see if data will conform to a theory.
Choosing techniques	From various possibilities, I select procedures that I will use to collect data.
Securing IRB approval	I provide institutional leaders with enough information about my study to enable them to approve it as an ethically sound project.
Accessing participants	I invite people to take part in my study.
Data collection	Using my chosen techniques, I engage study participants.
Data analysis	I discover patterns in my data and make summaries of those patterns.
Data interpretation	I discern what the data mean, perhaps in conversation with previous studies, a theory, or a doctrine.
Reporting on findings	I write about what my study discovered, following appropriate scholarly conventions.

1. **Topic selection.** Every research study has a focus. In some cases, you may conduct a bit of research assigned to you by an instructor. For instance, in a class on pastoral leadership you may be told to interview a pastor to unearth how that pastor understands leadership. Or, in a class about worship, you may be asked to attend a worship service and notice what's going on. In the case of Doctor of Ministry programs, you

may be asked to choose your own research topic. Some of you reading this book already know what your topic is; others of you are thinking about dozens of topics that interest you. My rather banal (but important) point is simply that you must have a topic in hand in order to conduct qualitative research. As we will discover in chapter 3, a key part of designing a viable qualitative research study is narrowing the scope of your topic down to a manageable size.

2. **Literature review.** While you may be the first person to study a topic in a given setting, it is very likely that there is a body of published literature pertinent to your study. As a librarian, I am surprised if I cannot find at least some published musings on a topic that is more than fifteen minutes old. Reading good scholarship about your topic serves three functions. First, it helps you not start from scratch in your thinking and research design. Second, it demonstrates to your instructor (or readers of your research report) that you are humble enough to notice that you are not the first person to think about your topic. Finally, when you are trying to make sense of your study findings, your literature review gives you a set of conversation partners with which to think about your findings. In my first big research project, I knew from my literature review that those who did the *Being There* study (Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and Marler 1997) concluded that each seminary was preaching a dominant message to students. I included a research question about that finding in my study and then could talk about what I found in light of previous research (Lincoln 2009). It is tempting for researchers to treat the literature review as a waste of time or a distraction from the interesting work of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. In the long run, however, conducting the literature review is time well spent because it helps you, your instructor, and your readers see what is distinctive about your study.

3. **Research questions and hypotheses.** In qualitative research, researchers frequently construct research questions rather than hypotheses. ***Research questions*** have the general form of "What *themes* do my *participants* voice about my *topic*?" The research questions are shaped by your specific topic and by results of previous research. The answers to the research questions are provided by participants. In many cases, a general research question may be divided into related sub questions. For instance, if I were interested in understanding how members of a congregation thought about stewardship, I might break down the question "What themes do congregational members voice about stewardship?" into sub questions like: "What themes do they voice about giving of time?" "What do they say about financial giving?" I discuss research questions in detail in chapter 4.

   Sometimes qualitative researchers pose ***hypotheses***. They might take the form "*Participants with certain characteristics will voice certain themes*." For instance, in a study about spiritual practices among adults in a given congregation, a researcher might hypothesize that "Women will talk about the importance of supportive friendships more than men do." A hypothesis is not a guess. There should be some underlying reason for imagining a certain outcome in advance. Two primary reasons for offering a hypothesis are:

   a. First, the results of previous research. If several studies have produced similar results, it may be sensible to suggest that your study will also find the same conclusions. Thus, I might hypothesize that women will value supportive friendships more than men simply because other studies have drawn that conclusion.

b. A second reason to test a hypothesis is theoretical. To continue with the same example, I might hypothesize that women value supportive friendships as a spiritual practice more than men do because of a theory about how women and men are socialized (Kane 2012; Wearing 2011).

4. **Choosing techniques.** As a researcher, you must choose techniques for data gathering and analysis at the beginning of your study. The primary techniques that I will explain in this book are interviewing, questionnaires, and observation. Part of good qualitative research is the consistent use of your chosen techniques. You should choose techniques that fit your research questions, are feasible given all of the demands on your time, and that you can competently employ.

5. **Securing IRB approval.** Before you begin to collect data, you need to have your school's ***institutional review board*** (IRB) consider your project and determine that it meets expectations for the protection of study participants, including the securing of written voluntary consent. For a small-scale study, your professor may receive approval from the IRB on behalf of students. Chapter two discusses IRBs and consent in detail.

6. **Accessing participants.** In qualitative research, you are trying to find out what some group of people think, believe, and have experienced. You need to be confident that you will be able to engage a sufficient number of those people to collect data for your study. As you will discover in chapter 4, there are often barriers between the researcher and potential participants. These barriers include formal gatekeepers and ethical concerns (e.g., interviewing children about their ideas about Jesus would entail gaining consent of both the children and their guardians). Without the ability to find willing participants, you cannot conduct a qualitative research study.

7. **Data collection.** In qualitative research, ***data*** takes the form of transcripts of interviews, answers to questionnaires, and notes documenting the researcher's observations. As you will discover, data collection in qualitative research is labor-intensive. You should expect to hit bumps in the road. People do not always keep interview appointments; a snowstorm forces you to cancel a focus group.

8. **Data analysis.** Once participants have told you their views via interviews or questionnaires, after you have made observations and taken meticulous field notes, the work of ***data analysis*** begins in earnest. Data analysis is the messy business of taking pages of notes or dozens of interview transcripts and finding patterns in them. Generally, an army of one is doing this analysis: you. Chapter 8 discusses ways to be systematic about finding patterns and to assure yourself that the patterns are in the data and not mirages of your mind. Traditionally, qualitative research employs something sinisterly called the "constant comparative method," which suggests that analysis never finds an end point (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 335–44). Take heart, qualitative research has also discovered the phenomenon of "theoretical saturation," which asserts that you will reach a point where the themes and subthemes you notice simply repeat themselves and analysis can stop.

9. **Data interpretation.** Data analysis involves finding patterns in data and summarizing them. It is a way to report succinctly about what the data say. ***Data interpretation*** is the larger hermeneutical task of arguing for what the data mean. Researchers frequently interpret data in conversation with previous studies, a theory, or a doc-

trine. At this point in your study, it is a good practice to look again at your literature review. My key point of emphasis here is the difference between analysis of data and interpretation of them. Analysis is a descriptive task. Interpretation is a more contested task that suggests underlying reasons for the patterns found in data. Chapter 9 discusses making interpretive sense of data.

10. **Reporting on findings.** In my doctoral work, a consistently hilarious reference made by professors was to "writing up" research, as if the process of writing was simply putting an ornamental frame around the real work (i.e., fieldwork). In fact, there are scholarly conventions for writing about qualitative research. I will introduce you to the genre of research article in the next section. In chapter 11, I will speak at length about the genre of the final doctoral report for Doctor of Ministry research. If you struggle with academic writing, take heart. As you analyze and interpret data, you are writing a series of reports to yourself. You have also written down the design of your study in order to convince your professor and IRB to approve your work. These documents are building blocks for your final report on findings.

To summarize this section: the qualitative research process has ten steps. Some of the steps are clearly foundational and must be done up front. If you don't have a focused topic and research questions, there is no reason at all to recruit participants and collect data. A summative report on findings, logically, can only be done at the end of the study. As you will soon discover, some steps in between are not strictly sequential. Qualitative researchers often discover that they cannot access as many participants as they had hoped, or they unearth something that calls for some kind of follow-up data collection not anticipated in one's initial research design. Qualitative researchers also begin thinking about the meaning of data from the moment that they conduct the first interview, see the results of the first questionnaire, or make the first observation. In other words, there is no hard and fast distinction line between data collection and data analysis.

The Qualitative Research Article: Standard Elements

It is helpful for beginning qualitative research researchers to know how professional qualitative researchers report on their findings. The next part of this introductory chapter describes the parts of high-quality articles published in peer-reviewed journals in the social sciences. As you work on the literature review for your study, you will (I hope) read articles written in this style. You can think of such articles as having a distinctive genre like a haiku poem or a newspaper editorial. Knowing about this genre will help you work your way through articles that may seem to "bury the lead" and use terminology unfamiliar to you. Typically, qualitative research articles have nine parts, even though authors may use different headings from those I identify here. The table below succinctly lists the nine parts as answers to questions. A fuller explanation of each part follows.

Table 1.4 — Standard Parts of a Published Qualitative Research Article

Introduction	In general, what is this study about?
Significance Statement	Why is it important to study this topic?
Research Questions and Conceptual Framework	What are the foci of the study?

Table 1.4 — Standard Parts of a Published Qualitative Research Article

Literature Review	Who has studied this topic in the past?
Method or Methodology	What techniques are used in the study?
Results	What did the researcher find out?
Interpretation of Results	What do the data mean?
Study Limitations and Implications for Practice	How confined was the study (e.g., number of participants)? If study results are taken seriously, how might practitioners change their work?
Areas for Further Research	What other facets of the topic might be researched? Based on findings, what new areas might be explored?

Here is a fuller description of the nine elements.

1. **Introduction.** The article starts with sentences to spark interest or set the issue into the larger scholarly context. The introduction might be as simple as asserting "Every Sunday, thousands of people choose to visit a house of worship that they have never attended before." Sometimes the introduction is a variation on sentences like this: "Ministers and seminary professors have long been interested in helping sermons to connect with hearers."

2. **Significance statement.** A qualitative research article commonly makes assertions about why the general topic is important and for whom it is important. Frequently, one reads sentences like "research about topic X is useful/pertinent/timely/important for four sets of stakeholders. Group 1 will benefit because of reason 1; group 2 will benefit because of reason 2, etc." While articles in the humanities may simply assume that a topic is fascinating in its own right, in the social sciences, authors are expected to make a brief argument about significance, even if they simply note that an area is understudied. It is not unusual for the significance statement to be contained in the article's introduction rather than having its own heading.

3. **Research questions and conceptual framework.** Early in the article, authors say "This study looked at my general topic in the specific context of Y using approach Z. The research questions were: 1, 2, and 3." Research questions describe more focused aspects of a general topic. For instance, the research question for a study about giving money to support the work of the congregation might be "How do the reasons for giving money differ between life-long Presbyterians and those who became Presbyterians as adults?" While some social science research claims to be atheoretical (interesting without respect to any kind of published explanations for the phenomenon being studied), other research makes explicit statements about a conceptual framework or set of commitments (constructivist, feminist, etc.) that undergird the research. These statements are important, because they tell you a lot about what the researchers value and how they will make sense of the findings (results) of their study. Increasingly, researchers also explicitly talk about who they are (using terms such as social location, positionality, or intersectionality) as they describe their research questions. For

instance, you might read "The author is interested in how Korean American evangelicals perceive the importance of prayer in daily life."

4. **Literature review.** Articles spend varying amounts of space reviewing other publications on the same topic. This section convinces the reader that the author has taken time to read what other researchers have found—in other words, to demonstrate that she is a scholar. The literature review can be used to show the distinctiveness of the author's own study. For instance, you might read that "previous research on Topic X has found A, B, and C. However, these studies focused on alpha and beta. The study reported on here did [something else that is interesting]." More often than you might think, the literature review ends up saying "While other researchers have studied related topics, no published studies of Topic X are extant." This conclusion suggests a knowledge void. Researchers like knowledge voids because it means that journals will publish studies that fill the void.

5. **Method or methodology.** The article summarizes the particular research method used. If the method is widely known, this summary can be relatively brief. In qualitative research articles, it is good practice to relate the method to a book on research methods via a footnote because there are so many different ***methods*** used in qualitative research. In the section on methods, researchers also say things like "a total of 15 pastors were interviewed over a period of 3 months." Some research studies employ pseudonyms in publications to protect the identity of research subjects (e.g., Big Provincial University has 15,000 undergraduate students and is located in western Canada.) This is a good practice.

   Writers need to explain their method clearly enough that their results are not challenged on the ground of such things as sampling errors, inconsistent use of a survey instrument or interview protocol, and the like. Qualitative researchers need to make statements in this part of the article about how they got from gobs of data to understandable results (= patterns, themes and subthemes). In other words, method encompasses both how one collects data and how one analyzes them. When reading a report on a qualitative research study, the reader needs assurance that researchers followed procedures to assure consistency and avoid unacknowledged bias. Thus, an article might say "The researcher and a consultant analyzed thirty interview transcripts and coded them using Dedoose software. They found seven key themes."

6. **Results or findings.** Many readers skip directly to this part of the article. Here the authors report what they found—that is, they summarize data. In qualitative studies, this part of the article is where you read statements like "four major themes emerged" or "while almost all women in the study felt positively about X, men in the study were evenly divided between those who felt positively about X and those who felt negatively about it." Generally, qualitative research reports like texture and a variety of opinions. Because qualitative studies generate a lot of text quickly, it is common for articles to focus on only some results. In that case, researchers need to explain why they chose to report as they did and why they left out some findings. Alas, because of space limitations there are few direct quotations from participants in most scholarly qualitative research articles.

7. **Interpretation of results.** This section of the article is sometimes drably labeled "discussion." What study *participants say* is different from what *researchers* think those words *mean*. Articles may contain two kinds of interpretations: the research-

er's thinking about "why" questions, often supported by the conceptual framework sketched at the beginning of the article, and how these results compare with previous research. Commonly, this section of an article is longer than the results section, because qualitative research is not simply an exercise in description. Readers want to know why as well as what. It is important to talk about the meaning of results in detail. Findings are, at one level, not disputable: we interviewed a group of people on a topic, and this is what they said. This result seems about as disputable as reporting that the high temperature yesterday in Oklahoma City was 84 degrees. What can be contested, on the other hand, is why respondents said what they said. Did they talk about things as they did because of their Jewish or Muslim or Christian faith? Was it because they were victims of an oppressive, male-dominated church? The specific conceptual framework (theory) used to make sense of results must be one that fits the data. Interpretation, in some sense, always goes beyond facts to explain the results, even if the explanation is only partial.

8. **Study limitations and implications for practice.** This part of an article answers the classic "so what?" question. Does something that the study found give the authors reason to suggest that someone should do something differently in the real world? That's an implication of research findings—an inference drawn from the study. For instance, a researcher might write "Findings suggest that congregations stop sending youth on mission trips to poor parts of North America because. . ." Social science researchers should always remind readers that "this study looked at students at only one middle school" or "the thinking of 15 Unitarian ministers may or may not be representative of all Unitarian ministers." These statements are study limitations. Remember: all studies have limitations.

9. **Areas for further research.** You can't study everything at once. Research reports often state that the study focused on only some of the possible facets of the subject. Further research might illuminate other areas. A result may suggest completely new areas for research. For instance, if a study about the Bible-reading habits of teenagers found that one third of participants went to the Internet for help in understanding the scriptures, another study might focus exclusively on how teenagers use these online Bible helps. Sometimes the results of the study may contradict the results of several other studies. In that case, further research may be needed to find out why.

Thought Problem: Reading Qualitative Research Below are bibliographic references to three articles that generally follow the qualitative research article genre. Read at least two of them. How much space is devoted to each of the nine parts described in this chapter? Are some parts missing?

- Vaidyanathan and Snell 2011
- Campbell-Reed and Scharen 2011
- Hibbert, Hibbert, and Silberman 2015

If you compare the elements in qualitative research articles with the steps of the qualitative research process in Table 1, you will see that almost every step gets a little bit of space in the final write-up. As a novice researcher, you will be rewarded at the end of the process for faithfully following your research process in proper sequence and for documenting every

step of your work. Such diligence makes it easier to write up the results following scholarly conventions.

Before we end this overview of the standard parts of a qualitative research article, let's revisit the significance statement. Work through the questions in the exercise below.

Exercise: Significant for Whom? Review the definition of significance statement in this chapter. For which individuals or groups might the following qualitative research studies be important? Hint: don't overthink.

- A study asking high school students about their experiences of Sunday worship.
- A study asking long-time members about what it means to belong to a congregation.
- A study asking ministers about juggling their pastoral duties with family life.
- A study asking church members about why they participate in social justice ministries sponsored by their congregation.
- A study of a parish that lost members because of gross pastoral misconduct.
- A study asking members what it is like to listen to sermons.

What is the difference between identifying a group of stakeholders for whom a study might be useful and recognizing that a given topic is interesting to me?

Just as there are countless poems and ballads about the heartbreak of unrequited love, there can be countless helpful studies about worship, the meaning of congregational membership, or a minister's work-life balance. These topics are significant to thousands of church leaders whose vocation it is to assist the community's worship and witness. Studies about motivations to engage in social justice are of note to leaders in other congregations who want to enhance social justice ministries. Sadly, a study in a parish that experienced pastoral malfeasance is significant to the church broadly because such misconduct is not rare. It might seem redundant to identify who might benefit from a qualitative study about how congregants listen to sermons. Three pertinent audiences are: ministers who preach regularly, persons who also listen to sermons, and seminary professors who teach homiletics. Thinking about how a study might be helpful to persons besides the researcher reinforces the notion that solid qualitative research can impact the work of ministers and congregations. In other words, qualitative research is one way to do practical theology.

This Isn't Rocket Science, It's Qualitative Research

Almost every author has an imagined audience for his or her work. I imagine that readers of this textbook are students in theological schools or their professors. I imagine that a good percentage of you are Doctor of Ministry students—i.e., working ministers who are getting additional professional training. I further imagine that readers of this book have five things in common which will help you learn how to be a competent qualitative researcher. You have:

- **Curiosity.** You wonder about why the world works the way it does or why some people do the things that they do.

- **Concern for people**. Because you are a pastor or are studying to be a minister, you care about people and want to see them thrive. Because you care, you also understand the need for ethical boundaries to protect people.
- **Listening skills**. You know that listening is helpful. You know that an important part of listening is being quiet and suspending judgment. You also know that listening does not inevitably lead to getting your turn to talk about your experience or to solving someone's problems.
- **Theological sensitivity**. As Dori Grinenko Baker (2012, xviii) puts it, you listen "as if you expect God to show up" in the stories of others. The ability to reflect theologically will help you to examine data and see both its surface (what people said) and features that suggest depth (what people mean and why they said what they said). Both social sciences and theology share the assumption that whatever seems to be "just obvious" ought to be interrogated. Both share a hermeneutic of complexity.
- **Time management skills**. Today's theological students wear many hats, which is another way of talking about intersectionality. In addition to being a student, she or he is likely also a spouse and/or a parent and works at least part-time. You are able to get through your busy weeks and years because you keep track of how you allocate your time. Time management is a valuable skill because qualitative research is labor-intensive. It requires the researcher to attend to tasks on time or the wheels come off the research process.

Each of these five characteristics will help you as you engage in qualitative research. Doing research is fueled by a curious imagination. Caring about others honors the personhood of your study participants, and enables you to collect the kind of data that you want. Theological sensitivity helps you look deeply into data and discover subtleties and textures that you would miss without discipline. Being able to manage your time will keep your project moving forward. When I was in library school, being introduced to some new nerdy dimension of the field of library and information science, professors would often pause and say without irony, "you can do this. It isn't rocket science." And you, my imagined reader, can do qualitative research.

CHAPTER 1: KEY POINTS

» Qualitative research investigates what it's like for a person or group of persons. In other words, it investigates human experience, as does practical theology.

» Those who engage in practical theology use methods that can be broadly called Wesleyan because they attend to scripture, tradition, reason, and personal experience.

» Those who engage in practical theology are Tillichean in method when they correlate deep human questions arising from contemporary culture with answers found in the Christian tradition.

» A qualitative researcher needs to attend to positionality—the complex relationship she has with study participants.

» Intersectionality describes the mingling of race, class, gender, and beliefs in all individuals. Thus, intersectionality is at work in both the researcher's identity and the identities of study participants.

» The qualitative research process has a distinctive sequence. Key to the process is asking research questions of a suitable set of persons on the topic of interest to the researcher.

» The standard elements of a scholarly qualitative research article echo the steps used during the research process. It looks tidy when written up, because you made it through the messy parts to the end.

» Ministerial students and ministers already have background skills useful in QR: curiosity, concern for people, listening skills, theological sensitivity, and time management.

CHAPTER 2

Research Ethics

> *I will abstain from all intentional wrong-doing and harm . . . And whatsoever I shall see or hear in the course of my profession, as well as outside my profession . . . if it be what should not be published abroad, I will never divulge, holding such things to be holy secrets.*
>
> – Hippocrates of Cos (1923), physician

> *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets.*
>
> – Matthew 7:12 (King James Version)

Concern for professional ethics is ancient. Greek physicians were taught not to inflict harm or pain upon their patients and to hold doctor-patient conversation in confidence. Christians affirm ethical principles rooted in the Bible and the experience of the church. The great commandment of Leviticus to love one's neighbor as one's self is fleshed out in the Decalogue with injunctions against certain behaviors (committing adultery, stealing, coveting, lying under oath) and in favor of others (honoring the Sabbath and parents). In the New Testament, Jesus sets out a manner of life under the rule of God, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly through parables (e.g., the Good Samaritan). Biblical ethics involves a sense of empathy and reciprocity: do to others only what you would want others to do to you. Those studying for ministry or engaged in officially recognized ministries are also expected to adhere to ethical standards of denominations. These standards note that ministers stand in a relationship of bounded authority that respects congregants or counseling clients (Baptist General Convention of Texas 2018, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 2020). There is also a body of best practices and legal requirements regarding the treatment of study participants to which qualitative researchers must adhere in Canada and the United States. Thus, ministry students that engage in qualitative research studies find themselves ethically bound times three: as Christians, as ministers or ministers in training, and as researchers. Because researchers should engage in their work ethically from beginning to end, I have placed my main discussion of research ethics at the beginning of this book.

This chapter does six things. First, it traces the tragic history of scientific research studies that led to formalized standards for research with human beings. Second, it discusses informed consent as an ethical good. The chapter distinguishes between two views of informed consent: a weak view and a strong view. Third, the chapter discusses the protection of the identities of subjects at all stages of a qualitative research study. Fourth, the chapter raises ethical questions surrounding monetary incentives for participants. Fifth, the chapter discusses the researcher as an ethical, albeit fallible, person who is fully present to participants during the study and who continues the duty of care throughout the process of interpreting and reporting findings. Finally, an argument is presented that institutional review boards

serve an ethical function beyond simply protecting an institution from legal liability. To put these obligations into the language learned in chapter 1, because of the researcher's positionality, she has certain ethical duties to perform in relation to others.

A Tragic History: The Need for Ethical Standards in Research with Human Subjects

Social scientists who interact with people have developed ethical rules to minimize the harm caused by their investigations. Sadly, many of these formal rules were developed in response to twentieth-century "scientific" studies that trampled upon human dignity. In the realm of medicine, one notorious case was the long-term study of men with syphilis (1932–72) conducted under the auspices of the United States government and the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Researchers intentionally withheld treatment to a group of men—all African Americans, all poor—so that researchers could monitor the devastating long-term effects of the disease (Reverby 2009). The subjects of the Tuskegee study had no idea that they were the subjects of a formal study. In 1997, President Bill Clinton formally apologized to the survivors. In the realm of psychology, Professor Phillip Zimbardo randomly assigned the roles of prison guards and prisoners to male students in a class. For a week in 1971, the "prisoners" were held in the basement of a university building and the "guards" became increasingly abusive (Reicher and Haslam 2012). Tellingly, Zimbardo was not disciplined for his experiment and went on to have a distinguished career (Zimbardo 2012). I've given you two examples from the United States. Sadly, examples of scientific researchers treating people more like lab rats than persons are documented elsewhere, in authoritarian states and liberal democracies (Felton 2009, Paul and Brookes 2015).

In the United States, a turning point in the ethical treatment of human research subjects came in 1979 when the Belmont Report, written by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, was released (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1979). One member of the commission, Dr. Karen Lebacqz, was a professor of Christian ethics. The report outlined ethical principles for the treatment of people who take part in behavioral or biomedical research. The report named the cardinal principles of ***respect*** for persons, ***beneficence*** (the obligation to do no harm and to maximize possible benefits), and ***justice*** (for instance, not conducting research with persons from a group unlikely to benefit from the results of research). To apply these ethical principles, the report recommended that researchers gain informed consent from participants, assess the benefits and risks associated with a study, and use fair procedures to select persons to participate in research. Both the expectations and the language of the Belmont Report (informed consent and institutional review boards) have become best practices and legal requirements for research involving people in the United States.

Informed Consent and Its Corollaries as an Ethical Practice: Eight Obligations of the Researcher

Ensuring that participants in your study "know what they are getting into" is a key part of the protections that participants should be given because of your ethical values. In order that potential participants are adequately informed about your study, best practices call for

the researcher to obtain written ***informed consent***. The researcher should do the following eight things:

- Explain the *general purpose* and goals of the study (e.g., "this study seeks to discover the needs of new members so that ministers can do a better job of integrating them into congregational life").
- Specify what the participant will be asked *to do* in the study, including time commitments (e.g., "take part in one focus group lasting 90 minutes and be interviewed later on for no more than one hour").
- Describe possible *dangers* of participation. For instance, some studies may stir up difficult memories. In such cases, the study should have a mechanism for referring participants to competent counseling services. For many kinds of qualitative research, the danger of participating is understood to be no more than the danger encountered in everyday life. Dangers associated with qualitative research include social consequences of being discovered to have taken part in a study (for instance, because the researcher does not provide enough filters to ensure that one's identity is protected in a publication about the study) and psychological stress related to thinking about the subject matter of the study.
- Describe *rewards* to participation. In general, qualitative research studies offer only intangible rewards such as enjoying being interviewed or the knowledge that the study may help ministers improve their skills. I discuss monetary rewards later in this chapter.
- Demonstrate *institutional oversight* of the study by stating that the study has been approved by a review board and providing contact information to someone other than the researcher.
- Detail how data will be *protected* and used, including how data might be used in reports and publications.
- Detail steps taken to protect the *identity* of participants.
- Make it clear that, even after consent has been given, participants may choose at any point to *stop participating* in the study.
- When possible, secure a *signature* from all participants and give them their own copies of the signed consent form.

Appendix A provides an example of a succinct consent form that contains all these elements. If a school has created an authorized form, the student simply needs to add the specific elements of her own study to the school's standard template.

To think more deeply about the complexity involved in properly informing study participants about "what they are getting themselves into," jot down your thoughts about the questions in the exercise below. Then read my comments.

Exercise: Informed . . . Adequately? You will conduct a qualitative research study about how worshipers in your congregation experience Sunday worship. What are the ethical strengths and weaknesses of the following three introductions to a study?

- The purpose of my study is to understand how you experience Sunday worship.
- The purpose of my study is to understand how you experience Sunday worship so that congregational leaders can decide what, if any, changes to make.
- As your pastor, I think worship has gotten stale lately. The purpose of this study is to allow you to talk about your experience of Sunday worship.

The first option for explaining the purpose of this hypothetical study informs participants in a general way about the purpose of this study. Without other context, it isn't clear why you are doing the study. This option leaves unsaid researcher interest or possible practical use of results. This statement doesn't give hints about what the researcher hopes to find (or not find). The second statement has the same broad purpose (understanding) but communicates that results will be shared with congregational leaders. This added piece of information may cause some persons to balk at participating; or it may encourage some congregants (either pro-change or pro-status quo) to take part. Further, this statement suggests that unspecified leaders are aware of the study. The third statement might be completely accurate. It certainly lays the pastor/researcher's cards on the table. While disclosing more fully than the first statement the researcher's feelings about the worship life of the congregation, I wonder if it would scare off participants who disagree with the pastor's assessment. Or the statement might be understood as an implied rebuke to those who disagree with the pastor. In general, a researcher may state the purpose of a qualitative research study succinctly when obtaining consent. However, it is always necessary to signal possible harm that might accrue from participation, including embarrassment. It is especially important to alert participants if their views will inform decisions that affect them. In addition to a written statement, the researcher should also be prepared to answer any questions about the study's purpose and use of findings that participants ask at the start of interviews or other research activities.

The value of beneficence stresses that human subjects should not be harmed by their participation in research. In medical research, the prospect for physical harm (or the lack of positive benefit) may be present. For instance, in a clinical trial, one group of patients might receive an experimental drug while another group (the control group) receives a placebo. It is possible that those in the control group end up being deprived of the positive effects of the drug—should it prove efficacious. The drug may also have harmful side effects. The types of help and harm associated with social science research generally are not of this magnitude. Nevertheless, participation in a qualitative research study may engender unwelcome emotions and memories. Jot down your thoughts about the questions in the exercise below.

Exercise: Participation . . . Harmful? Helpful? You will conduct a qualitative research study with adults who experienced the camping ministry of your denomination as teenagers. You want to conduct a series of three interviews with each participant.

- How would you describe the possible risks for taking part in this study?
- How would you describe the benefits of taking part?
- What would you want to say about support for participants for whom the interviews stir up troubling memories?

The risks associated with this study are different from those associated with medical trials. Better or worse physical health is not on the line. For some participants, the interviews could stir up powerful emotions associated with a conversion experience, teen romance, or perhaps inappropriate behavior on the part of camp staff. Discussing going to church camp could stir up bad memories of bullying or peer pressure. Benefits of participation might include improving how your fellowship operates its camping ministries (if results are reported to camp leaders) or the evocation of nostalgia. From ethical and design points of view, it is important for a researcher to think in advance about how to support persons emotionally if a study like this one should cause emotional distress to interviewees. For instance, the researcher might include contact information for local mental health services on the consent form. The researcher also should remember that participants may choose to stop participation at any point in the study. The consent form should explicitly state this option. Participants might feel comfortable for one or two interviews but decline to take part in the third. The researcher also needs to understand any legal obligation to report credible allegations of abuse. The researcher should not promise absolute confidentiality when she has a legal obligation to report possible crimes. The laws and procedures on reporting vary by state in the United States (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2019) and by province in Canada (Child Maltreatment 2020).

To summarize this section, obtaining informed consent is an ethical practice whose purpose is to provide potential participants in a study with enough information so that they can make up their minds about whether to participate. By providing enough information, the researcher shows that there are procedures in place to prevent harm from befalling participants, should they choose to take part.

Informed Consent Critiqued

There is no hard and fast rule mandating how much information a researcher needs to share in advance with potential participants to meet the burden of adequately informing them about the study. At seminaries, studies conducted by students that involve human subjects are typically reviewed by an institutional review board (IRB).Other responsible persons besides the researcher are involved in determining how much information should be shared about the study. Some critics have challenged the concept of informed consent as the purely voluntary act of a completely autonomous human being. They point out that each of us has been socialized into pre-understandings about things like the goodness of science, the importance of expertise, and the privilege of taking part in projects that make the world a better place. Just because someone is "conducting a study," potential participants are already inclined to defer to the researcher. In other words, the researcher holds a tremendous amount of power and my consent is always based on limited information. Fundamentally, I simply must take the researcher's word for it that I will not be harmed by the study (Schiff 2003). Let's call this understanding the ***weak view of consent***.

Critics argue that the problem with the current practice of obtaining consent is that researchers do not honor the real autonomy of participants enough. Participants are competent persons who make decisions about whom to vote for in elections and with whom to establish legally binding contracts. They have the capacity to weigh the benefits and costs of taking part in research better than the research establishment gives them credit for. Current practices infantilize participants instead of fully honoring their agency. If we accept the view of human autonomy theorized by philosopher Charles Taylor (Taylor 1989), we could reform our processes so that participants give robust consent to their participation. Reform would require researchers to share more details in advance and to engage potential study partici-

pants in extensive conversation (Stoljar 2011). Let's call this understanding the ***strong view of consent***. Before proceeding further, work through the exercise below.

> **Exercise: Consent Contested** Review the list of best practices for informed consent earlier in this chapter.
>
> - Which elements seem to support the weak view of consent? Why?
> - Which elements seem to support the strong view of consent? Why?
> - How does your theological understanding of human persons shape your own thinking about voluntary consent in the context of research?

Several standard practices for obtaining informed consent seem consistent with the weak view. For instance, by the time potential participants see consent forms, institutionally appointed experts have decided how detailed the forms need to be and what details the forms should contain. Obtaining consent does not seem much like a negotiation. Participants either sign on the bottom line, or not. Because potential participants are presented with a standard form written by researchers, it seems that the practice is premised on the weak view of consent. At the same time, it is a best practice to encourage participants to ask questions about the study before agreeing to take part. Standard consent forms (including Appendix A) encourage potential participants to ask whatever questions they like. When researchers take those questions seriously ("Can you tell me a little more about why you want to know what I think? Who exactly is going to read what you write about me?"), they are demonstrating respect for potential participants as competent individuals. In the Christian theological tradition, the affirmation that human beings are made in God's image is a common affirmation. Older Christian views about the nature of the human will and newer liberationist perspectives on human persons might be consistent with the strong view of consent. Both Arminians and Lutherans, for instance, agree that human beings have a great deal of free will about matters that do not pertain to salvation. (Being part of a research study does not save or damn anyone.) Christians who affirm newer liberationist views think that human beings shape their own histories and can cast off custom-bound chains of oppression, an emphasis of liberation theology and feminist theology. Thus, interactive aspects of obtaining informed consent seem consistent with the strong view.

Protecting Participant Identity at All Stages of a Study

Another way that the ethical principle of beneficence plays out in the conduct of qualitative research is the need to protect the identity of participants at every stage of the study. Consider the cases posed in the exercise below. Write down your thoughts before reading the paragraph that follows.

Exercise: That Person Seems Familiar How well do the following researcher behaviors protect the identity of participants in a study?

- In a final DMin project, the researcher includes a DVD of a focus group that she conducted with faces digitally blurred.
- In a research report, no names are reported, but individuals are identified using biographical information: "a 37-year-old man who had only recently joined the First Church said . . ."
- The researcher destroys audio recordings of interviews as soon as she has made transcriptions.
- Before turning in an assignment to the instructor, the researcher discusses the drafted report with the person interviewed.

In the first case, blurring out faces offers a modicum of protection to the identity of participants. However, voices are also distinctive. If participant voices were recorded, it would be possible for someone to recognize participants. Because of the need to protect the identity of participants, it is preferable not to include a DVD (even an edited one) in a report. In the second case, it might be possible to deduce the identity of a participant based on vivid details. To prevent this, some researchers aggregate data about persons falling into a category of interest. For instance, they might report what new members as a group said on a topic rather than providing biographical details about one specific person. In the third case, the researcher has provided a great deal of protection to participants by getting rid of sound recordings and relying on transcripts for further data analysis. While transcripts do not pick up nuances of human speech (ironic inflections, pauses, etc.), the flattening of the data via transcription removes the distinctive vocal elements that might identify a participant. In the final case, the researcher who shows a draft report to a study participant gives the participant a great deal of power to make determinations about whether some material might cause embarrassment or other harm. Crucially, getting feedback before the assignment is completed creates the opportunity to edit material to protect study participants.

Because it is possible for persons' reputations to be harmed simply if it is known that they have taken part in a study, a best practice is to remove the relationship between data collected from participants (in interviews, focus groups, and surveys) and the names of individual participants as soon as possible in the research process. It is a good practice to assign research participants a unique identifier that travels with all of the data related to that person rather than using the person's name. For instance, a woman who took part in the second of three focus groups might become participant 02-F-09 (where 02 refers to the focus group, F means female, and 09 means that she happened to be assigned the number 9 out of the 15 persons in the group). More about managing information about participants is covered in chapter 4. The key point is that you have an ethical obligation to protect the identity of participants at every point in the research process. By de-linking the name Jack Jackson from questionnaire responses and transcriptions of interviews with him, the researcher lessens the chances that a write up or preliminary report might inadvertently contain a sentence beginning, "As Jackson said. . ."

Your obligation to protect the identity of participants is not absolute. Participants might be proud they were asked to be in a study and mention it to others. Although you should not reveal that an individual took part in a study, you do not need to feign ignorance if the participants themselves acknowledge their roles. Because social worlds are finite, sometimes it is easy to narrow the possible number of research sites to a small number if you are in the

know. A classic study in sociology by William Foote Whyte attempted to mask the identity of the neighborhood—pseudonymous Cornerville—that was the focus of his research. Very quickly, many people deduced that Cornerville was the North End of Boston, where Whyte had lived for several years (Whyte 1955, Johnson 1982). It is common for final DMin projects to use the researcher's congregation as the setting. Even if the report describes the congregation as "a medium-sized Protestant congregation in the Southeast," if it is known that the author is also the pastor of St. John's Lutheran in Atlanta, the level of anonymity afforded to participants would be lower than it might be otherwise. The underlying reason for the practices of confidentiality and anonymity is, to stress the point one final time, to protect participants from harm.

Are Monetary Incentives Ethical?

Very often, the only rewards for taking part in qualitative research studies are intangible. A participant might feel good about helping a student with an assignment or helping his minister finish his Doctor of Ministry work. Sometimes, qualitative researchers also offer other incentives to participate. In a study I conducted with faculty from several seminaries, I was able to offer the reward of subsidized travel to a conference to discuss the findings of the study to two persons from each school that agreed to participate. In another study I conducted with seminary students, everyone who took part in a focus group got a raffle ticket. One lucky winner won an Amazon gift card for twenty-five bucks. Anthropologists frequently pay "key informants"—individuals with whom they establish long-term relationships—for their assistance in a study (Srivastava 1992). Because many kinds of qualitative research require face-to-face interaction with the researcher and make considerable demands on the time of participants, incentives matter. Krueger and Casey contend that "from a practical aspect, it would be next to impossible to conduct focus groups without incentives in some situations" (Krueger and Casey 2000, 90). What are the ethical concerns about paying people to take part in a study? Consider the four examples in the exercise below.

Exercise: Rewards for Participation Assume that, in each of the following cases, the researcher has gotten approval from the appropriate supervisors to conduct the study and to offer incentives. As a qualitative researcher, which incentives are ethically justified? Are any of them ethically troublesome to you? Why?

- To recruit high school students for a focus group at a middle-class suburban church, a researcher promises to order everyone's favorite pizza for the event.
- To recruit parents with young children for interviews, a researcher promises that childcare will be provided at the interview site.
- To recruit eight participants to be interviewed three times (90 minutes each), the researcher offers an honorarium of $1,500. It turns out that fifteen people agree to volunteer. The researcher only has funding to pay eight, so others are turned away.
- To recruit adult participants for a ninety-minute focus group, the researcher promises to donate money to the youth group mission trip fund. The size of the contribution grows depending on the number that shows up: $750 if eight take part, $1,000 if twelve take part, and $1,500 if fifteen take part.

In the first example, providing refreshments seems to be an inexpensive form of hospitality that would make the focus group experience more enjoyable for participants. In a middle-class setting, I doubt that anyone would think that this level of incentive was anything but normal politeness, on par with serving free coffee and cookies after Sunday church services. People value hospitality, so this level of incentive seems quite consistent with religious beliefs (and simple civility). In the second example, providing childcare to participants might address a real barrier to participation. Indeed, this incentive shows potential participants that the researcher has concern for their complicated lives. Thus, this incentive is an appropriate gesture for the well-being of participants. In the third example, the level of reward would get my attention (no one finds this much money lying on the sidewalk in my neighborhood) and motivate me to consider taking part. It may be troubling that the incentive is only available to a set number of participants—the lucky eight. One way to overcome the seeming injustices caused by limiting the reward to a subset of potential participants would be for the researcher to adjust the incentive so that everyone who agreed to take part in interviews got some compensation, then randomly select the eight persons needed. These eight persons would receive a higher honorarium consistent with providing more of their time. In the final example, the reward would not directly benefit participants but rather a worthwhile project about which potential participants care. In each of the four examples, it should be acknowledged that the researcher is exerting leverage on potential participants because the researcher has access to money. The leverage is intended to secure participation rather than to ensure that participants only espouse opinions that the researcher likes. In chapter 4, we will explore researcher power (and prejudice) in more detail.

> **Thought Problem** Are you convinced that offering small sums of money is ethically appropriate to insure participation in a qualitative research study? Where should the line be drawn?

What might happen if a researcher pays participants but becomes unhappy with the quality of data that they provide? Consider the example below. What ethical norms, if any, is this hypothetical researcher or participant number five failing to honor?

> **Exercise: A Poor Return on Investment?** Because of an outside grant, a qualitative researcher was able to pay five participants $500 per interview for three separate interviews. In the design of the study approved by the IRB and the consent forms that participants signed, each participant was promised payment at the end of each interview. The researcher gave participants a check at the end of each of the first two interviews. After reviewing transcripts, she concluded that four participants had given her colorful, intriguing data. They appeared genuinely interested in the questions that the researcher asked and would have been happy to continue interviews beyond the promised time limit. However, the researcher was unhappy with data from a fifth participant. He gave terse answers or extremely convoluted ones. The researcher was frustrated at these responses and thought that the granting agency would be unhappy with her final report. At the start of the third interview, she told the fifth participant about her frustrations and said that unless he showed more interest, he would only receive $250 for the last interview because he hadn't held up his end of the bargain.

In this example, the researcher is changing the rules in the middle of the game. Her study design provided for payments and consent forms spelled out a schedule of payment. The researcher is acting as if participants clearly understood that they had some sort of duty to be engaged—and to be "interesting". From the evidence provided to us in the scenario, it is not clear how the researcher communicated expectations about the content of interviews to participants. It is reasonable to expect that volunteers take part in studies because something about the research process (whether the topic or simply the opportunity to talk to someone) is intrinsically motivating to them. The researcher should want to know what participants have to say in response to research questions, whether or not their responses are especially interesting at the moment of the interview or retrospectively when transcripts are analyzed. Indeed, the concept of theoretical saturation suggests that qualitative researchers often get to the point where they are not hearing new information from participants. More about this issue is included in the final part of this chapter.

What should an ethical researcher do? The researcher wants to make the third interview productive. Rather than backing away from a stated commitment, she might review the transcripts from the first two interviews to determine whether or not some of the problem lies with the questions asked (the interview protocol) or the researcher's inability to pick up on some clues that might have led her to ask different follow-up questions than she did. She might even begin the final interview by asking participant number five how he thinks the first two interviews went. In short, a researcher should keep promises to participants about incentives even in cases where data from some participants does not appear to be as useful as others. As we will discuss in chapters 8 and 9, interpretation of data involves patient and repeated analysis. What seems boring in the moment or in the first (or fifth) reading of a transcript might turn out to be helpful once analysis is finished. The ethical point to be stressed is that the researcher should keep her promise to participants.

> **Thought Problem** When you worked through the last exercise, what assumptions did you make about the race, gender, or ethnicity of the researcher and study participants? How would your thinking change if the researcher in the previous example and participant number five were both Latinos? Why? How would your thinking change if the researcher in the previous example was an African American woman and participant number five was a woman who recently emigrated from Somalia? Why?

The Researcher as an Ethical Person

To this point in this chapter, we have discussed behaviors and practices that focus on the protection of persons who are participants in qualitative research studies. Now we shift our focus to the researcher. Even after worrying about institutional review boards and the good of research participants, a researcher faces other important ethical questions during the research process. In this section, providing limited information to participants, deception, respectful attentiveness in the conduct of your study, representation of the lived experience of others, and researcher errors will be explained. The important issue of data protection is included in chapter 4.

How Much Do I Reveal About My Study?

Earlier in this chapter, we discussed the ethical obligation to obtain voluntary, informed consent from participants. Two exercises helped you think about the limitations of informed consent. The conundrum for many researchers focuses on precisely how much or how little to share about the purposes, activities, and results of participation in a study. Qualitative research studies generally cannot make heroic claims like medical studies, which could result in proving the safety of a drug and thus saving lives or limiting suffering. Qualitative research studies have smaller purposes like increasing understanding or making some aspect of ministry or congregational life work better. These purposes can be communicated to potential participants succinctly. Consider the examples in the following exercise.

> **Exercise: Communicating the Purpose of a Study** Which of the following purpose statements do you prefer to include on a consent form given to participants in this hypothetical study?
>
> - The purpose of this study is to understand more fully what active members of Third Winsome Church find spiritually fulfilling about being part of the congregation.
> - The purpose of this study is to understand more fully what active members of Third Winsome Church find spiritually fulfilling and to analyze results based on characteristics of respondents (longer-term members versus new members, etc.).
> - The purpose of this study is to understand more fully what active Members of Third Winsome Church find spiritually fulfilling about being part of the congregation. Results will be analyzed based on characteristics of respondents to determine how well they match the researcher's hypothesis.

The first version of the study's purpose is succinct and clearly answers the question: why is the researcher conducting this study? The second version provides more procedural details about how the researcher will proceed. This added information does not change the purpose of the study, but it might get participants to think about why they were invited to participate. For instance, am I a long-term member or a new member? The third version may be completely accurate in describing what the researcher will do. Because this version mentions hypotheses, a potential participant might ask the researcher about them. The researcher is under an obligation to talk about them. Telling participants what the researcher hypothesizes does not seem ethically troubling, but this might prime some participants to provide data in ways that prove or disprove the researcher's well-constructed hypothesis. If you are confident that this study poses very modest risks to participants, you might feel ethically comfortable using the shortest version of the purpose of the study when writing the consent form.

It is possible to design a study using deception. For instance, you can go on YouTube and watch the famous exercise in perception designed by Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris (Simons and Chabris 1990). Participants are told to watch a film and pay attention to how many times people in the film pass a large ball between them. The leader then asks: "How many times was the ball passed?" The leader also asks: "Oh, by the way, did you notice the gorilla?" Reliably, a certain percentage of people in each group will not report seeing the gorilla, because they were focusing their attention on the assigned task. This experiment is

deceptive because it suggests to participants that the researchers want to know one thing (how many passes?) but in fact they want to learn about something else (i.e., whether telling participants to focus on an assigned task will lead them to ignore over visual stimuli, such as gorillas). Many examples of research studies in psychology employ this kind of short-term deception, which seems to be "telling a lie" only about as much as magicians are lying when they mysteriously pick your card from a deck (Sieber, Iannuzzo, and Rodriguez 1995; Krasnow, Howard, and Eisenbruch 2020). If a researcher affirms the strong view of consent, she would want to maximize the amount of detail she provides about the purposes, data collection procedures, and analytical processes of a study because the researcher believes study participants should be treated as thoughtful adults. If the researcher affirms the weak view of consent, she would be aware of the high degree of power she holds over potential study participants. Regardless which view of informed consent the researcher holds, deception is inconsistent with the ethics of qualitative research. A researcher is a guest invited to share part of the lives of study participants. Lies dishonor study participants, the research, and the researcher.

Thought Problem: Deception

- What is the strong view of informed consent? What is the weak view of informed consent?
- Do you think that small elements of deception are always inappropriate in a qualitative research study? Why or why not?

Being There: How You Pay Attention

Although you may feel excited about your study during the early stages of data collection, it is common for researchers to begin to feel that they "have heard it all before" as they continue to conduct interviews or make observations. This problem is compounded if your interview protocol gives people lots of room to talk without prompting *and* you are recording the interview for later analysis. In such cases, you may be tempted to go through the motions of asking questions, nodding appropriately, laughing at things that are funny, but not being especially attentive to the conversation in the moment. After all, you won't tease out themes until you have transcribed the interview. You may be tempted to glance at your watch and begin wondering what your next scheduled interviewee might say. From a Christian perspective, honoring persons as individuals (with their own stories) and as bearing the image of God requires a researcher to "show up" emotionally when she conducts interviews. Even though your relationship with a research participant may be brief, it is important not to reduce the person to an interesting object on the same level with rats in a maze or bacteria under one's microscope. To be emotionally present with participants, you may need to schedule interviews with enough time between sessions to allow yourself to recharge, especially if the topics are emotionally fraught. I found that researcher fatigue was a major struggle in my own research because I sometimes have had only one or two days available to interview participants. As people become more comfortable with remote interviews, it is possible that researchers will be able to space out interviews over time because they will be less bound by limited time literally on site with participants. I will say more about listening attentively in chapter 5.

Thought Problem How is engaging people in a qualitative research study similar to the ways that a priest or minister relates to people in a ministry setting? In what ways does a qualitative researcher engage study participants differently from priests and ministers?

The Ethics of Interpretation and Representation

Most discussions of research ethics focus on the need for the researcher not to harm participants. Gaining informed consent and providing anonymity are means to that end. A qualitative researcher also has ethical responsibilities as she makes sense of data (interpretation) and reports on the study to scholarly or religious communities (representation). In a medical trial, interpreting data may come down to determining whether the proposed treatment was more efficacious than a placebo. In qualitative research, interpreting findings is a more complicated process, which bears similarities to interpreting the Bible.

Recent biblical scholarship has taken great pains to notice that there is not a "neutral" vantage point for reading scripture. How a text comes across to different persons is partially a function of who those readers are. Thus, many scholarly articles and books offer feminist, queer, and post-colonial readings of the Bible because persons holding these points of view have not, historically, taken part in scholarly conversations about the meaning of biblical texts (Boer 2013; Hornsby and Stone 2011; Lapsley, Ringe, and Newsom 2012). Interpretation of the Bible is the exercise of power. Analogously, qualitative researchers have power because they are experts who will tell a story about persons who participated in the study. Like biblical scholars, the intersectionality of researchers impacts their interpretations. To think about the ethics of interpretation and representation, work through the following exercise. Write down your ideas before reading my comments.

Exercise: Telling Stories Truthfully Consider the following two scenarios.

- You are conducting a study about women who sought counseling because they experienced domestic violence. In your research you discover that one-third of women firmly believed that they should stay with their partners no matter what because marriage is a divine institution. You profoundly disagree with this conclusion both theologically and based on your experiences working with women in violent relationships. How should you interpret and report this troubling finding in your study?
- In a final DMin project, you interview members of your congregation to find out about how they listen to sermons (functionally, how they listen to *your* sermons). You discover that many participants seldom experience sermons as a word from God. Based on your theology, sermons function as such a divine word and do so even though persons might not respond to them as such in the short term. How do you interpret and report this finding in your study?

In both scenarios, the researcher is faced with findings that do not fit with the researcher's ethical and theological understanding. Indeed, the researcher might believe in both cases that study participants were disastrously in error. In the first case, it is possible to report the opinions of women who thought that God wants all married people to stay together in ways that make them seem the foolish victims of patriarchy or of one method of biblical

interpretation. Other ways to report this finding link it to a long Christian history of interpretation about the permanence of marriage while at the same time making clear that the researcher disagrees with the beliefs of some study participants. In some cases, it might *not* be necessary for the researcher/author to express his or her point of view in a write-up. After all, the study was presumably designed to find out the experiences and attitudes of persons other than the researcher. (In the next chapter I will name this approach as phenomenological.) The researcher has an ethical obligation to participants to report findings truthfully and an ethical duty to herself and to the audience for her research report. For instance, in the final written report on the study the researcher might situate the finding about marriage as an indissoluble institution (regardless of the presence of violence) as a result needing further study. The researcher might express the opinion that the finding points to the failure in teaching Christians about God's will for persons inside or outside of marriage (i.e., to live lives free from violence).

The second scenario may hit equally close to home. A finding that one's sermons are not received as God's word might cause the researcher/preacher embarrassment or lead to soul-searching; it is unethical to ignore data that speak to central concerns of a study. A qualitative researcher has an ethical obligation to tell the story that emerges from research, not the story that the researcher wants to tell. This task is challenging because the researcher who draws conclusions and presents findings to the world always carries the burden of her intersectionality with her. As we will see in detail in chapter 11, the structure of final DMin projects provides space for pastors/researchers to engage in theological and highly personal reflection about study findings in ways that honor study participants.

Ethics that Honor Difference

The discussion of the ethics of interpretation so far has assumed that it is ethically permissible for a researcher to study a wide variety of topics with all sorts of participants. Not everyone agrees. Some contend that White people should not conduct research and publish results about persons or communities of color. For instance, sociologist Alice Goffman—who is a White woman—conducted an ethnographic study of a group of young African American men in West Philadelphia (Goffman 2014). Her work has been criticized for several flaws, including not protecting the identity of study participants (Lubet 2015). Her work was also criticized for its failure to speak more broadly about the other African Americans who lived in the neighborhood to minimize the danger of "unintentionally reinforcing and/or sensationalizing racial and class stereotypes that can equate the lives of a few with that of most community members" (Chancer and Jacobson 2016). After not receiving tenure at the University of Wisconsin, Goffman was hired by Pomona College as a visiting professor, which led some to protest that the college was not working in the best interests of students of color (Brown 217).

To think about the ethical issues of the relationship between researcher and study participants, think about the scenarios in the exercise below. Bring to bear what you have learned about researcher power, intersectionality, and positionality. In my comments, I will be speaking from my own point of view as a White, male, American, older, bourgeois, Lutheran academic. I am unable to do otherwise.

Exercise: Real (Complex) People, Real (Complex) Researchers

- When a team of researchers studied a conservative evangelical seminary and a liberal protestant seminary, they intentionally sent the evangelical members

of their team to observe the liberal seminary and vice versa (Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and Marler 1997). Do you see any problems with this approach from an ethical point of view? Why or why not?

- A White Doctor of Ministry student wants to study an aspect of congregational life in a congregation within her own denomination that is multi-racial in its membership. Part of her motivation is an emphasis on inclusion in her denomination in response to systemic racism. Are there ethical issues involved in a White researcher conducting this study that would not be there if the researcher were a person of color? Why or why not?
- A male Doctor of Ministry student wants to study the effect of patriarchy on women who are members of his denomination using qualitative techniques. If you were the professor in charge of this project or a member of the institutional review board (IRB) reviewing the study's design, what ethical issues would you raise?

In the first example, one ethical concern might have to do with showing respect for those being studied. Liberal or progressive Protestants do not always get along well with conservative evangelicals. In this research project, the main data-gathering techniques were observation and individual interviews. The researchers had gotten permission from the boards of each school to conduct the study. In this study, the researchers dedicated the book reporting on their findings to study participants (Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and Marler 1997, viii). If researchers understand the constraints of positionality and their bounded roles as guests and outsiders (rather than claiming to be diagnosticians, critics, or fixers), they can ethically study persons and groups that do not share all of the researcher's theological beliefs. In the second example, the student sees her work as an appropriate response to systemic racism. Of course, she is not the only person who needs to conclude that the design of her study is appropriate. The leadership of the congregation will no doubt need to discern, based on the specific ways that the researcher will conduct the study, if the goals and design of the proposed study make sense to them. The notion that Whites can and should fix things for persons of color is sometimes called the "White savior complex" (Bandyopadhyay and Patil 2017). If a person of color were the researcher, I doubt that this issue would arise because the potential researcher would not be able to exert White privilege to harm anyone. Put another way, there is the question of whether the White researcher is using power appropriately. Situations of difference are not always symmetrical in terms of perceived rewards and risks. In the third example, the supervising professor might probe the student's motivation for studying patriarchy further. A man concerned about sexism might be instantiating male dominance by acting as the expert (authority figure) in the study. Perhaps not, but the researcher would be obligated to explain how the doubly complex issue of researcher power (as expert in a male-dominated society) will be resolved to create a safe space for study participants, even in a time when many women are publicly speaking out against sexual coercion and violence (Union 2018). Inviting women to talk about their personal experiences of sexism might trigger emotional distress. The institutional review board (IRB) might ask how the male researcher would be able to prevent possible harm to his study participants. The IRB is responsible for preventing such harm; the board might require the student to show what he would do in cases where his study causes distress to participants. For instance, the board might require consent forms to contain contact information to counseling services that are available to participants who might need them.

In each of the three examples in this exercise, a common factor is the degree of perceived difference between the study participants and the researcher. Because humans are complex,

it is challenging to determine how different aspects of our intersectionality function in different settings, including the unusual relationship between a researcher and those interviewed or observed in a qualitative research study. Even when we assume that a study can take place only when participants give informed consent, from an ethical point of view, the needs of the researcher are outweighed by the needs of the potential pool of participants. It is not appropriate for outsiders to presume that they are entitled to study a given set of persons. Despite perceived expertise, the researcher is always a guest.

> **Thought Problem** As a reader of this book, you may identify as White, biracial, Korean American, or as an African American. You may be gay or straight, politically to the left or to the right. You have a religious identity as well. Take a few minutes to reflect on how your intersectionality is at work as you think about ethical questions of representation and honoring difference.

Researcher Errors

While conducting a qualitative research study, researchers follow a carefully prepared sequence of activities that is every bit as complex as those used to make an elephant out of paper using origami techniques. You may make mistakes along the way. For instance, a researcher might fail to back up a digital file and lose a precious interview. A researcher might misattribute opinions because of defects in data management. For instance, was participant 027 a woman who prayed daily or a man who stated that he seldom prayed? A researcher might misconstrue comments because of cultural or theological distance. Because the interpretation of qualitative research data is highly iterative, a researcher might tell participants in good faith about preliminary findings and conclusions, only to draw completely different interpretations upon further review. While all these errors are regrettable, the kind of harms caused vary. None of the mistakes mentioned would cause direct harm to a study participant. Loss of data due to sloppiness seems to betray the value of taking participants seriously as individuals with their own distinctive stories to share. Thus, even data management has ethical dimensions. A researcher has ethical obligations to do one's best and to prevent harm. A researcher, despite her best efforts, cannot promise morally perfect research practice. In the next section, institutional review boards, whose purpose is to review the design of a research project to protect potential participants from harm, are discussed.

Review Boards as an Ethical Practice

As this chapter has shown, qualitative researchers are expected to meet ethical obligations to prevent harm and maximize benefits to those who participate in their studies. These values are consistent with beliefs about respect for all people, hospitality, and human flourishing. The key ethical function of institutional review boards, often called IRBs, is to provide a fresh set of eyes overseeing potential studies before participants are recruited. Review boards also exercise a fiduciary responsibility for a school. They prevent studies without adequate safeguards for participants from happening, thereby protecting the institution from litigation. If a researcher intends to conduct a study in a counseling center, hospital, or school, the researcher might need to present information for approval to a second IRB, that

of the research setting. How do IRBs work? In the IRB process, a researcher explains the purpose and procedures of her study to the board in writing. The researcher also identifies desired participants (e.g., pastors in one geographical area). The board expresses its approval of a study only when the researcher has established minimal safeguards for participants. Typically, the researcher provides evidence of having procedures for gaining informed consent, protecting the identity of participants, and securely storing data. Boards may also review specific questions to be asked. Boards take special care if a researcher plans to study a vulnerable population, such as children. The length of time required for the IRB to make a decision varies depending on how complex a study is and the procedures of each institution. When a novice researcher is faced with this level of review, which is more bureaucratized than gaining permission from an instructor for a topic for a term paper, she may see the IRB as a maze of red tape standing between her and the start of data collection. However, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter, IRBs exist in response to researcher arrogance that led to suffering for participants in so-called scientific studies. IRBs have an important ethical function in the research process.

Conclusion

Qualitative research takes place within social contexts. As such, qualitative researchers face multiple demands based on widely-held professional principles (such as beneficence) and principles which grow out of the researcher's own values. To honor the requirements of protecting research subjects, the research community has agreed to practices such as obtaining written informed consent from subjects and the vetting of research proposals by institutional review boards. The sources of these values include the researcher's religious faith or spirituality and political commitments. As discussed in chapter 1, the researcher may only be partially aware of her values and their sources until a unique circumstance brings them into conscious view. The researcher is obligated to do all that she can to protect study participants from harm throughout the research process.

CHAPTER 2: KEY POINTS

- Formal standards for studies involving human subjects grew out of concern to prevent researchers from repeating the unethical practices of researchers in the twentieth century.
- Ethical values affirmed in many codes of research ethics include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.
- Informed consent takes study participants seriously. Researchers disagree about the amount of study details that participants should be given during the process of receiving informed consent.
- To prevent harm, a best practice is to shield the identity of participants throughout a study, both in data management and in published results.
- Providing modest monetary incentives to participants is ethically acceptable, provided that payments are not contingent on telling researchers what they want to hear.
- Ethical researchers strive to be attentive to participants even in the face of researcher fatigue and theoretical saturation.
- Researchers have great power to interpret the lifeworlds of participants. It is incumbent upon researchers to relate findings faithfully, even when they disagree with the researcher's hypothesis or theological viewpoints.
- Because of the power differential between study participants and researchers, circumstances exist in which it is inappropriate for a researcher to collect data from a desired set of study participants.
- Institutional review boards (IRBs) help researchers ensure that they do not harm study participants by reviewing the details of a proposed study in advance.

PART 1 SUMMARY

- Qualitative research explores human experience in natural settings like congregations.
- Practical theologians benefit from using the techniques of qualitative research.
- There are standard expectations for how a researcher reports the findings of qualitative studies. These expectations closely echo the steps that a researcher uses to conduct the study.
- The conduct of qualitative research studies requires careful planning.
- Qualitative researchers have ethical obligations to study participants and themselves throughout the course of the study and in writing up results.

PART 2

Design

In many areas of life, spontaneity is valuable and gives life pleasant surprises. Sometimes going to a restaurant is a more enjoyable experience simply because you decided to go out to eat on the spur of the moment. In qualitative research, however, intentional design is the key element of the entire research process. By design, I mean making choices about:

- what to study
- the overall approach to conducting the study
- the specific research questions that focus the study
- specific techniques to use to collect data
- methods for recruiting participants in keeping with ethical norms
- the sequence of data collection and provision for protecting data
- a plan for interpreting data

To think about the benefits of planning, please respond to the questions in the following exercise.

Exercise: Who Needs Planning? In many fields, design refers to the general pattern of an object or activity and how individual parts fit into a harmonious whole. For instance, much thought goes into the design of a smartphone. Aside from all the tiny computer parts inside, it is important that the device fit the hand (including the limitations of fingers and thumbs) and that the screen has high resolution.

- What examples come to mind of seminary or ministry activities that should be planned (designed) thoroughly in advance?
- What examples come to mind of seminary or ministry activities that work better without meticulous preparation?

- Why did you put some categories into the well-designed bucket and others into the spontaneous or more flexible bucket?
- What are reasons for imagining that qualitative research might work better by carefully attending to research design at the start of a project?

My list of seminary and ministry activities that benefit from thorough planning is long (perhaps because I have spent most of my career as an administrator). Seminary courses and Bible studies both benefit from advanced planning. Students expect a map of their courses (the syllabus) and a reliable indication of when courses will be taught (thus academic calendars and course projections). In my theological tradition, sermons are generally planned rather than spontaneous. In your tradition, the opposite might be true: the movement of the Spirit is elusive and unpredictable. We cannot plan for its appearance. While sometimes a meal should be planned well in advance (the retirement banquet for the outgoing seminary president), sometimes much of the fun happens from seeing what people and food shows up (potluck dinners). Planning and spontaneity are not complete opposites, of course. Many of my colleagues work long and hard on syllabi but report that the real work (and joy) of teaching happens in moments of unplanned dialogue. A danger of not intentionally planning activities is that we will default to our habits and mistake habit for spontaneity.

Qualitative research benefits from careful planning for several reasons. Having a plan helps you know literally what to do next. Part of the design process means deciding which generally recognized methods to employ. Having a plan also helps you communicate with other stakeholders in your study, giving a rationale for the approach that you use. Time is a limited resource in qualitative research. Designing a project well allocates time efficiently so that the study can be completed within a reasonable period of time—after all, students need to turn in assignments by the end of the term. While DMin students have more time to complete a study than master's-level students might, DMin students are "on the clock" for the maximum duration of their program. To say the same thing more formally, the design of a study provides a coherent sequence of research activities, which, when undertaken with rigor, will produce findings that are credible according to accepted standards in the field. Good design answers the skeptic who thinks that you "just made things up" or "found what you wanted to find."

In chapters 3 and 4, you will be introduced to the range of research design activities that a researcher controls. After all, it's your study. At the same time, the researcher is faced with the seemingly daunting task of choosing among several alternatives. The trade-offs that occur when making these choices are presented while keeping in mind the facts of finitude: you can't study everything. You have limited time and resources. And you can't study even a small thing exhaustively.

CHAPTER 3

Getting Started

> *'Cheshire Puss [Alice asked] . . . Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?' 'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cat.*
>
> *'I don't much care where—' said Alice. 'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat. '—so long as I get somewhere,' Alice added as an explanation.*
>
> *'Oh, you're sure to do that,' said the Cat, 'if you only walk long enough.'*
>
> – Lewis Carrol, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, chapter 6.

When I was doing a pastoral internship in New Jersey in the 1970s, I met a sweet, retired couple who seemed to understand how to get the most out of life. Since their time was relatively unstructured, they were able to engage life spontaneously. For instance, if they decided to take a vacation, they would pack their clothes, get in the car and drive to the entrance of a freeway. Only then would they decide: do we drive north to Maine? Or south to Virginia, perhaps? This is a wonderful attitude to have about going on trips when you have enough time and money. It is not a helpful mindset for conducting a research study. Beginning a qualitative research study is difficult because you are required to make a series of interconnected decisions. Each decision that makes a project smaller has the cost of saying "no" to many alluring side paths. Fortunately, a novice researcher does not have to make all of these decisions alone, and best practices for making them exist.

This chapter is about the first steps of the researcher's journey. Start, first, where many ministry students begin: choosing a topic or area of research. Because topics come in many shapes and sizes, there is a practical need to narrow one's topic and to learn how to do it. Second, broad reading helps the researcher to narrow her topic by getting the lay of the land and reading what others have said. This preliminary work, often called the literature view, can take a great deal of time and become a world to itself. A comparison of a comprehensive literature review required in PhD dissertations with the more limited expectations of a DMin final project or smaller projects is included in this section. Just as importantly, a discussion about information seeking (as librarians call it), the procedures that ministry students should use (after Googling it) to find reliable information will follow. Third, a range of research designs and their underlying rationales in a brief form are presented. In the world of the social sciences, these research designs seem endless (Creswell 2007, Creswell and Creswell 2018, Crotty 1998, Yin 2003). The focus will be on phenomenological, liberationist, and project approaches. The first two approaches are common in social science research. The project approach (including a ministry intervention) is often used in DMin final doctoral projects. Because this book is addressed to seminary students and working ministers, some

time will be spent relating practical theology to research design. If you begin to feel lost, flip back to chapter 1 (the overview of qualitative research) to get your bearings.

What to Study: Finding and Narrowing a Study Topic

A qualitative research study must be about a definite something (the phenomenon of interest) and must be bounded in ways that make it possible for the researcher to engage that something. Sometimes ministry students are simply handed a topic by their instructor and given specific directions about how to approach it. For instance, if your instructor assigns everyone in the class to interview a youth minister and observe that minister in action at a youth event, the instructor has helpfully clarified the nature of this small bit of research. The instructor might also give students a series of questions for the interview and ask them to pay special attention to how the youth minister demonstrates emotional intelligence when leading the event. By contrast, students doing a capstone MDiv course, writing a thesis, or designing a final doctoral project in a DMin program may be expected to pursue topics of their own choosing and to determine study methods. In these cases, the burden of choosing a workable topic falls to the student.

Discovering Your Topic

Ideas for qualitative research studies come from many sources: personal experience, an enthusiastic professor, professional reading, a ministry need. First, personal experience may activate your interest in a specific topic. For instance, being part of a church choir or praise band might inspire you to study the complex experiences that go along with being a member of a church choir. Second, professors may suggest topics. Sometimes their enthusiasm for a seemingly small point in a long lecture convinces you that the topic is worth your time and energy to explore further. Third, your scholarly or professional reading may help you discover a topic. A key feature of most theological education is immersion into the history of Christian experience and the ideas of the communion of saints. Seminary students read a lot. Reading the sermons of Augustine and Dwight Moody might cause you to wonder why preachers living more than a thousand years apart can still "make contact" with you. Browsing books on a shelf helps some students discover helpful books. For many, browsing is fun. That's one reason why used bookstores stay in business in an age of e-books. Spending time in the book stacks at a theological library or searching keywords in a theological school's online library catalog can generate many ideas for research. Searching the open web using Google or other search engines can also generate topics. One advantage of searching a seminary library (either online or in person) is that those materials have been specially selected (curated) for the needs of ministry students. Finally, your work in ministry may identify a problem or area of concern in congregational life that could helpfully be studied using qualitative methods. As Savage and Presnell assert, "Ministry practice and research always launch from the agenda of the religious professional, however covertly it is held" (Savage and Presnell 2008, 53). As we will discuss in detail in chapter 11, final projects in Doctor of Ministry programs are rooted in a specific ministry context (in many cases, a single congregation) and focus on a specific ministry challenge. In DMin programs, the final doctoral project must be constructed in such a way as to engage a concrete ministry problem rather than to pursue knowledge for its own sake.

To practice thinking about possible qualitative research topics, complete the following exercise. My commentary follows the interest box. It is perfectly fine if your reflections differ from mine or from other classmates.

> **Brainstorming Exercise: Vocation** Read and reflect on this quotation about how persons discern a calling, or vocation, to ministry: "As believers, we know the business of finding vocation—this business of becoming fully human in relationship with God—is both existential and communal work" (Svennungsen and Wiginton 2005, 7). Jot down ideas that come to mind in response to the quote. Write down everything as it comes.

Svennungsen and Wiginton's quote about vocation set my mind riding out in several directions at once. Am I not fully human until I discern my calling in life? How does the existential part of discerning vocation work? Am I even sure what existential means? What community or communities are involved as I discern my vocation? Do they mean my congregation? If I am a seminary student, does the quote refer to my denominational committee? Is this discernment a dramatic "road to Damascus" experience or a subtle "still, small voice?"

Putting down ideas in informal paragraphs without self-censoring, sometimes called free writing (Brande 2019/1934), is one way to generate ideas about possible research topics. If you know that you will be conducting a qualitative research study at some point during your theological education, it may be helpful to keep a running list of possible topics on your phone or computer, just as ministers frequently keep lists of ideas for sermons or sermon illustrations. As you read throughout your degree program or as part of your ongoing continuing education, it is likely that your reading will trigger ideas for possible research projects. More about reading later in this chapter. If your mind works like mine, it is helpful to write down a note along the lines of "this article by Smith and Jones seems to connect with the book that I read last semester about preaching to recent immigrants. Now that I think of it, that reminds me of . . ." It is helpful to write down these fleeting ideas. They may only visit you once.

Narrowing a Topic

Once you have found a topic that you like, you may discover that you could spend a lifetime researching it. Below is a list of excellent, albeit large, topics for qualitative research studies drawn from books about congregational life and pastoral ministry. I found them by browsing the pastoral theology section of a seminary library. For each broad topic, I've briefly added a comment on why these are good topics, in other words, why they are significant. Remember what you learned in chapter 1—a good qualitative research study should be interesting to persons besides yourself.

Splendid and Large Topics for Possible Qualitative Research Studies

- **Pastoral identity**—"what faithfulness may mean in a time such as this" (Lathrop 2006, vii). The work of ministers is important for congregational life. Understanding how pastoral identity functions today may help other ministers fulfill their callings.
- **Pastoral fit**—the "complex dynamics between congregational features and pastoral leadership" (Woolever and Bruce 2012, xiv). Understanding that certain congrega-

tions will benefit from calling a specific kind of leader will assist congregations and ministers broadly because leaders can better match the needs of congregations with the strengths of particular ministers or priests.

- **Pastoral work** viewed from the perspectives of **feminism**. "Who needs a feminist perspective? For a start, women do. Then so do men and children. And, to be honest, so does the whole created order" (Moore 2002, 7).
- The **concealed, corporate relationships at play in congregations** (Galindo 2004, 3). Ministers stuck in congregational conflict and members of congregations will benefit from better understanding dynamics that are not obvious.
- The **role of chaplains** serving patients in health care centers. This role has changed as the religious and spiritual practices of people have become more diverse in traditionally "Christian" contexts (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 157–91).
- The impact of **non-governmental agencies** on those they seek to serve. Qualitative research methods can help these organizations discover the intended and unintended consequences of their work (Davis and Hart 2005).

Each of these six topics could be the focus for a qualitative research study, especially for one using ethnographic methods, which classically would involve intentional observation of a microculture for at least a year. What should you do when you cannot devote a year of your life to such observation? How can you narrow a broad topic into something that is more manageable for your own research? At least three ways exist to shrink the scope of a potential study—i.e., to narrow the topic: by exploring how other scholars or researchers have already found logical subdivisions within the topic, by deciding what subdivisions make sense to you conceptually (researcher interest), by thinking about data-collection limitations.

First, you can narrow a topic by doing more background reading. Such reading frequently reveals how other scholars or researchers have already divided these very large wholes into parts. For instance, Israel Galindo (2004) has identified several important factors—what he calls "hidden lives"—in congregations. A given congregation has a distinctive identity, a particular theology, and a sense of purpose (vision). A congregation also has its own style of spirituality. Right away, the very broad concept of church dynamics becomes subdivided into several smaller topics. It would be far easier to conduct a qualitative research study about any one of these dynamics than to conduct one that attempts to gather and interpret data about all the dynamics that Galindo identified.

A second way to focus the size of a study is to limit your attention to factors that intrigue you because of your personal experience, theological commitments, or simple curiosity. Researcher interest no doubt plays a part in every qualitative research study. At my seminary, it is common for students just starting the Doctor of Ministry program to have focused ideas about their final doctoral project, which they will not work on for a year or more. These ideas frequently come from their love of a particular way of doing theology or a particular theologian (e.g., Karl Barth) or because of their own strength as a pastor. Good preachers want to become better at the verbal proclamation of the gospel. Good counselors want to improve their care-giving skills. Putting together a theological interest and a professional strength immediately creates a more focused inquiry, such as a project about "how Barth's theology relates to preaching." This combination (theological ideas plus specific ministry task) provides a conceptual framework (we'll get to a formal definition of that soon) and a focus more manageable than simply aspiring to conduct a project about preaching. When more limiting

elements are added— for instance, "how Barth's theology relates to preaching to millennials in my congregation"—the topic has been made much more focused.

Finally, there are real-world limitations that impact the size of the project that you can undertake about a given topic. You have limited time, for one thing. As you will discover, qualitative research is labor-intensive. Except for the case of a very modest topic (e.g., a one-time observational study), you will need to devote many hours to recruiting participants, collecting data, and making sense of them. A second limitation is your ability to gain access to participants needed for your study. Many of my DMin students report that there are only a few times during the cycle of the church year that they can count on having access to members of their congregation for research purposes. The summertime is out because so many people take vacations then. Christmastime and Holy Week are not viable because congregants are involved in worship and family celebrations. (The minister is also occupied with the same important things.) These limitations push qualitative researchers to think more deeply about how their studies can be designed to be completable. These limitations rule out some kinds of research that would be valuable. For instance, it would be beneficial to know about the long-term impacts of ministry activities such as mission trips with youth or changes in worship. If you need to finish a project in a year or two (so that you graduate!), it will not be possible to see how, for instance, the enthusiasm initially generated by a mission trip affects the vocational choices of teenagers in your congregation two or three years later.

The exercise below lists some preliminary topics or statements of personal interest, based on conversations that I have had with ministry students.

Exercise: Narrowing Broad Topics Practice narrowing these topics down to a manageable size for a qualitative research study by adding limiting factors that make sense to you. I will provide some of my own in the paragraph that follows.

- Youth ministry is my passion, so I want to study something about youth.
- I'm a hospital chaplain. I have had patients tell me to get out of their rooms because I'm African American. This is very hard to take.
- Everyone seems to have strong opinions about our Christmas Eve services. We've done two of them: one kid-friendly and another geared towards adults. Lots of guests from out of town attend. But attendance was down last year. It's so much work to offer both. The leadership council wants me to think about simplifying the services.

The first example is at a very general level. The researcher is interested in youth as persons and in ministering to and with them. Wonderful place to start! A qualitative research study would become more focused by limiting the study to middle-school youth in my congregation or girls in high school. Another way to limit the study would be to think more about aspects of youth ministry. Is the researcher excited about developing relationships with children? Helping youth understand the Bible better? Is the researcher passionate about youth ministry because working with younger people offers the opportunity to create a society less plagued by racism and injustice? Notice that some of my suggestions for limiting a study are about "which youth in particular" and others are about "which aspect of youth ministry." Another helpful limitation would be to specify a research setting, such as "I want to study how the youth ministry program at St. Timothy's helps middle school students become aware of the Bible's call for justice."

The second example can be recast as something like "I am concerned about the relationship between the ethnicity of hospital chaplains and their reception (or rejection) as ministers by patients." Perhaps a better re-framing is "I am concerned about how African American chaplains are received by White patients in hospitals." This interest could be sharpened even more by stating researcher interest, as in "I want to study African American hospital chaplains and their experiences of racism on the job." A project involving both chaplains and patients would be far more challenging than a qualitative research study that focused on hearing what African American chaplains had to say about their experiences in ministry. As I think about this example, I am aware of my intersectionality. I am writing as a White academic, not an African American hospital chaplain. People with different backgrounds from mine might see other (better) ways to focus a study on this topic.

The third example—Christmas Eve worship services—grows out of a perceived ministry problem in a specific congregation. In my experience, many DMin final projects start out this way. In terms of creating a manageable study, this degree of specificity is helpful. The limitation to one's own congregation is far more bounded than "I want to study something about youth." In the example, the concern is not about worship in general, but Christmas Eve services in one church. Finally, there is the notion that change might make the services "better" in the sense of meeting the spiritual needs of worshippers better or not exhausting the worship leaders. Nevertheless, there are many implicit threads in thinking about a congregation's typical way of celebrating Christmas. What is the theology of worship of the congregation? Of the pastor? What role does hospitality play, since the services attract a high number of visitors? How might the congregational culture shape or limit changes? In this example, the pastor seems to be tasked with a "deliverable"—a proposal for changing these services. A qualitative research study might appropriately focus on only one part of the work that the pastor would do as she attempts to fulfill this request.

In the next section, the importance of reading pertinent literature at the early stages of the design of a qualitative research study will be discussed. Before you move on, think about what kind of reading would be helpful to the three students whose broad topics or areas of concern were listed in the previous exercise. Also think about how you would find information to help you focus your research—what librarians call the "information-seeking process."

Exercise: Reading about Potential Topics Jot down your thoughts before moving to my comments in the ensuing paragraph.

- Because my general topic is youth ministry, I should read: _____. I will find that information by doing: _____.
- My topic is how racism affects chaplains, so I should read: _____. I will find that information by doing: _____.
- My topic is how hospital patients relate to chaplains of an ethnicity different from their own, so I should read: _____. I will find that information by doing: _____.
- I want to reimagine Christmas Eve worship, so I should read: _____. I will find that information by doing: _____.

Regardless of the topic, I can easily imagine you might have suggested key theological or biblical texts. For instance, if I wanted to reimagine Christmas Eve services in my Lutheran congregation, I would refer to classic Lutheran sources and more recent reflection on how to create worship services that welcome persons of all ages and visitors, especially those whose

only experiences of Christian worship might be Christmas and Easter. Reading for possible studies about hospital chaplains differs when I specify that I am concerned with racism (thus, pushing me to read more about discrimination and prejudice) rather than interethnic relationships in chaplaincy settings. By framing the youth ministry example as I have, I have moved away from reading more about youth (e.g., the specific challenges faced by youth school students in my country or region) to reading about pastoral activities among youth (e.g., what seem to be techniques for ministering to teenagers?). Because you are preparing for a qualitative research study, it is necessary to read other empirical studies about your topic. Do not limit yourself to theological discussions that do not connect doctrinal and biblical concepts to the lived experience of contemporary persons.

What steps did you write down about how you will find the information that you need? Perhaps you included "using my library" and websites that you are familiar with, such as your denomination's official website. Did you think about using an Internet search engine? In the next section, I discuss finding and reading pertinent published literature in detail. I begin with an explanation of the literature review, then talk about specific ways to find reliable, authoritative information in which to ground your study.

Reviewing Pertinent Literature

Isaac Newton—the English genius who invented calculus and formulated a law of universal gravitation—wrote, in a moment of modesty, "if I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants" (Newton 1675). In Newton's time, scholars frequently communicated the results of research using letters. The scholarly journal was invented to distribute scientific findings to broader audiences (Carey 2013). As qualitative researchers, we do not start from scratch when thinking about a possible topic for a qualitative research study. Both our life experiences and formal education shape us. Martin Luther's religious insight about being justified by faith alone was grounded in his own search for a loving God and in his careful reading of ancient Christian texts—the Bible. One of the positive aspects of the Internet is that it has taught people something that librarians and scholars know because of their professional training: it is very likely that someone else has already written about your topic of interest. It has become an established habit for people to "Google it" when casual conversation results in disagreements about who starred in *Citizen Kane* or who is currently the manager of the Mexican national men's soccer team. Theological education, at its best, teaches students that it is important to read what others have said about the Bible, the Christian life, and practices of ministry. As you think about a topic for a qualitative research study, it is important for you to discover what other scholars and researchers have written. In social science articles and DMin final projects, one is expected to demonstrate that you know that you stand on the shoulders of giants (or reasonably tall people) by summarizing pertinent thinking towards the beginning of the article or report. This section is commonly called a *review of the literature* or *literature review* in social science circles. Among friends, it's the lit review.

In this section, I first talk about the importance of reading other scholarship in general. Second, I discuss how reporting on what you have read functions in constructing your qualitative research study and writing up your findings. Third, I contrast expectations for the literature review required in PhD dissertations with the more limited expectations of a DMin final project or smaller projects. Fourth, I offer suggestions for the process of finding pertinent information related to your study.

Why Read Anyway

I first begin by talking about the importance of reading scholarship. Once upon a time in the twentieth century, I took a religion course in college. I came across a journal article that began: "As everyone knows, Canon Muratori is a list of New Testament books that was found by Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672–1750) in the Ambrosian Library at Milan . . ." (Sundberg 1973, 1). I was eighteen years old and had read my Bible, but I confess that I did not know anything about the Muratorian canon. That religion course opened my eyes to entire continents of scholarship that were new to me. Although I suspected that Christians had been writing about the Bible for nigh on two thousand years, I was not part of the conversation.

As a novice qualitative researcher, reading scholarship related to your topic helps you in three ways. First, broad reading gives you basic literacy so that you know how to ask intelligent questions and understand the answers. For instance, to be part of a conversation about qualitative research related to the lives of ministers, you need to be aware of the various ways that ministers use their time and what may cause them stress. Literature in this area uses terms like "work-life balance" and "burn out." Without a basic understanding about how work-life balance has been discussed (Gray 2012), it may not seem sensible to you that burnout among ministers is caused by an imbalance in the time spent on professional duties versus other aspects of a minister's life.

Second, broad reading introduces you to the history of research about your topic. Chemists discovered that combining certain chemicals invariably leads to explosions. Future chemists need to be aware of this finding for their own safety, but also because it frees them from spending resources on doing experiments that will not contribute to the knowledge base. Reading about how other qualitative researchers addressed your topic helps you to see patterns in techniques and ebbs and flows of researcher interest. To put it another way, the literature review helps you discover the known center and unknown edges of a topic of interest.

Finally, broad reading sparks the imagination so that you become interested in a topic and find a distinctive angle of approach to address it. In the classic work *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills asserts that social scientists need imagination to make sense of a welter of facts. "The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals" (Mills 2000, 5). In my own education, it has sometimes been reading something tangentially related to my main interests that has ended up sparking helpful ideas. When I was studying higher education administration in graduate school, I took a course in the anthropology department. In it, I was required to read an article about the religious practices of a tribe in Amazonia (Overing 1990). The author used Nelson Goodman's idea of worldmaking (Goodman 1978) to explain the complex hermeneutical processes used by shamans to make sense of their world. I was already interested in the array of ways in which people make sense of their individual lives, the organizations in which they worked, and the congregations that nurtured their spiritual lives. Discovering Goodman's approach was so exciting that I read his book and ended up using his ideas as part of the philosophical underpinning of my dissertation. I dare say each of you has had similar experiences of serendipity, all because of reading widely. Reading sparks the human imagination.

The Functions of a Lit Review in Qualitative Research Studies

While reading broadly has a salutary effect on your development as a theological student and researcher in general, the literature review fulfills several important functions when con-

structing your study and reporting on it. This distinction requires some elaboration. Even if you were not expected to write a section of a journal article or DMin project formally called a literature review, reviewing relevant and potentially relevant literature at an early stage of your work is important in the construction of your study. First, background reading helps you make a claim for the significance of your study. I may simply assert that my study of immigrant Christians is important—or I may know from background reading that the proportion of persons living the United States who were born outside of its border is 13.5 percent (more than 43 million). I may also have discovered that much of the vitality of congregational life in the United States today is due to immigrant Christians (Grandberg-Michaelson 2013). The level of detail provided by background reading makes my argument for the significance of a study about some aspect of immigrant Christian experience more worthy of attention. Second, your background reading tells you about what aspects of a topic others have already researched and how they did it. By reading other reports of research, you will be alerted to findings that others have found puzzling. You may wish to explore these in another setting. Or you will discover that, based on what a researcher discovered, there are new areas to study. The logic of scientific inquiry keeps pushing forward from one set of findings to more questions: the more that we learn, the more new things we become intrigued by. Many DMin students also read other DMin projects to get ideas about methods. Experienced researchers know how to use a variety of methods. Like experienced golfers, they know when it is best to use a driver or a putter. Because many DMin students lack a background in research techniques, they look at other final doctoral projects to examine (and perhaps borrow) the methods used by others. Two sources for final projects from North American seminaries are the Theological Resource Exchange Network and ProQuest. I will talk about them in more detail later in this chapter.

The practice of reading deeply at the start of your study assists in designing a robust project. Your written summary of pertinent literature in a write-up does four important things. First, as already noted, the review helps you to talk about the significance of your topic. Second, the review establishes your credentials as a credible scholar. Writing down the genealogy of scholarship on a topic demonstrates to readers that you are part of the guild: you know what "everybody knows" in the field. Third, a good literature review helps you explain why what you are doing may be new and contribute to greater understanding of your topic. Fourth, the literature review gives you a sounding board with which to interpret the findings of your study. The authors that you mention in the literature review become important conversation partners as you interpret your findings. By comparing what your study discovers with what others have found and with the explanations for findings put forward by other scholars, your work becomes something more than an isolated project. To put it another way, taking part in a scholarly conversation contributes to the available knowledge base about your topic. For a literature review to do these four things, it must be much more than an annotated bibliography. Such a list can help you keep track of the main points of articles and books read, but it cannot demonstrate that you have noticed patterns in published literature or come to any synthetic insights based on your reading. A good literature review makes judgements about the strengths and weaknesses of published literature on your topic. It is, in the best sense, an act of scholarly criticism.

The Wisdom of Goldilocks: The Right-Sized Lit Review

Doing a literature review takes time and can become a seemingly endless quest. A colleague of mine wrote his doctoral dissertation on a twentieth-century philosopher. He once told me that no PhD student at his school had written a dissertation on a nineteenth-century (or

earlier) philosopher in ages. Why? Because the expectation for the literature review would have required a summary of one or two (or four or five) centuries of scholarship about the student's topic of interest. Such a literature review could truly be called comprehensive. In the case of DMin final projects or other qualitative research that ministry students engage in, the expectation seldom is for such a level of detail. An adequate literature review has three characteristics. The review:

- situates the study within some lineage of previous research,
- comments on the strengths and weakness of previous research, and
- honors institution-specific expectations regarding how much effort is devoted to theological ideas, methodological concerns, and empirical research on similar topics.

A few comments are in order about these three characteristics. First, an adequate literature review should note that I am not the first person to conduct field research about my topic. If that topic is stewardship, I should discover other studies about how groups of Christians somewhere have engaged in sharing their time, talent, and treasure for God's purposes. Notice that, in this context, previous research does not mean "what Christian authors have written about the theology of stewardship." It is important to declare one's theological roots, but in a literature review a key point is to show that others have conducted social science research on the topic or that theologians have addressed the topic using approaches that keep close to human experience. To put it another way, the literature review should be about stewardship as practiced by actual Christians rather than a compilation of theological and biblical ideas about stewardship. Similarly, there is a difference between "the biblical and theological underpinnings of congregational life" and what we learn about congregational life from systematically studying how people "do church" or "are church" in living congregations. In a literature review for a qualitative research study, the researcher needs to attend as least as much to the latter as to the former.

Second, the researcher needs to demonstrate that she has not simply found a lot of journal articles and books but has read them. Previous research might have consistently used only one research method. Or previous research might have found contradictory answers to roughly the same research questions. More often than you might think, one of the findings of a literature review is that little or no research has been published on your topic as such. (By the way: that is your lucky day as a researcher. Your study will add, if only in a modest way, to knowledge about your topic.) By commenting on the strengths and weaknesses of previous research at the beginning of an article or final doctoral project, you alert readers that what you have to say is worth saying. In your reading, it is important to note the methods that previous researchers used, what they found (research results), and theoretical viewpoints used. Chapter 9 will discuss in detail the importance of theory in good qualitative research. As a novice researcher, you will benefit from becoming aware of as many possible explanations (theories) as you can. As you discover publications about previous research, you may reach the conclusion that some of it is not very good. Nevertheless, you need to say something about the poorer efforts as well as the good. One of my professors in graduate school used to say, "hold your nose and write about it." Beginning scholars and researchers often worry about missing out on key information sources or become concerned that there is simply an endless amount of pertinent literature to read before beginning a study. In addition to following the information-seeking procedures outlined below, there is a general guideline for knowing if you have found the key sources. You are close to the end of your search for sources when you begin to find the names of the same authors repeatedly. At that point, you can have confidence that you exhausted the pertinent literature.

Finally, expectations for an adequate literature review vary by institution. Some schools will care just as much (or more) about the biblical and theological grounding of a study than about a thoughtful critique of previous empirical research. As an alert student, you will figure out the formal and informal expectations for literature reviews in your context. Should you have any doubt at all, ask your professors directly. If this is culturally frowned upon, ask successful students about what the professors really want in the literature review.

Needles, Haystacks, and Information Seeking

I hope that you now have a better understanding of why you need to discover what other scholars have said about your topic of interest. I next address the process of finding pertinent information related to your study. Librarians call this the information-seeking process. Since entire books and long journal articles have been written on the topic of conducting a literature review in the social sciences (Dawidowicz 2010; Machi and McEvoy 2012; Oliver 2012) and specifically for seminary students (Badke 2014; Vyhmeister and Robertson 2020), I will focus on a few selected points. To conduct a competent literature review, you should build on your own knowledge base and consult experts that you know. Both tasks need to be augmented by your own search for authoritative sources using online search tools that work like shopping on Amazon, but which connect you with vetted academic information at no cost to you.

Your Own Knowledge Base

By the time you are asked to do a qualitative research study as a ministry student, you already have accumulated a great deal of background knowledge. You understand your theological tradition in more depth than most of your contemporaries. You probably own more books than the people you live with wish you owned. If you prefer reading on paper to reading on screens, you may also have a file cabinet full of notes from classes and photocopies of especially loved or hated journal articles. You know a lot of technical terms that baffle people outside of seminary: exegesis, perichoresis, justification, and, last but not least, eschatology. Depending on your undergraduate major or line of work before going to seminary, you might also have a sophisticated knowledge of economics or psychology or engineering. By studying those disciplines, you strengthened your abilities in critical thinking. My point here is simply that you are not starting from scratch as you think about the literature pertinent to a qualitative research study. You already have background knowledge. If you have been musing about potential research topics, you may already have jotted down some sources pertinent to your research interests.

Consulting Experts: Professors, Fellow Students, and Librarians

In addition to your own knowledge base, as a ministry student you have ready access to a group of local experts. These are your professors, colleagues, and librarians. First, your professors have implicitly supported your study by creating required readings in syllabi for courses that you have taken. They should be open to having a conversation (or email exchange) with you about your area of interest. Many professors add sources to syllabi that they know students will not have time to read during the term, but which they should read. These aspirational reading lists take students deeper into a subject than a course typically allows. It is quite literally the job of faculty members to help students dig deeper. In addition, DMin students are typically assigned one or more project advisors (sometimes called read-

ers) who will point students to literature pertinent to specific projects. Second, your fellow students and colleagues in ministry are also sources of help as you attempt to discover publications related to your study. Your peers will be flattered if you ask to see a term paper that they wrote. Some ministers take their ongoing development seriously and are avid readers of professional literature. They, too, can help you discover literature pertinent to your topic.

Finally, you have access to individuals who are experts at finding information and helping others to learn how to find information: librarians. I strongly encourage you to schedule an appointment with a librarian at your institution at several points during your preliminary reading for a study. The best person to speak with might have titles like reference librarian, research librarian, or access librarian. Just as the special skill of real estate agents is to connect people looking for housing with homes that are for sale, the superpower of librarians is to connect patrons (faculty and students, in an academic library context) to high-quality information sources. Consulting a librarian will ultimately save you hours of frustration as you try to separate pertinent information from a bewildering amount of "hits" from Google or your theological school's online catalog or database-searching interface. As I will elaborate below, your library and your librarians are in a key position to know what you might need. Keep in mind that the books and databases in your theological library "are handpicked for you, chosen by experts [librarians and professors] to support the course work offered at your school" (Vyhmeister and Robertson 2020, 157). To put it another way, fishing for information on the open Web is like casting your line into the ocean. Fishing for information in your school's library is like casting your lure into a stocked pond. The probability of catching what you want increases dramatically when you fish in the right places.

Although no one can read articles or books for you, the process of doing your literature review should be a social, not a solitary, process. Librarians, professors, and your colleagues are good conversation partners.

Searching for Authoritative Sources

Every so often, I type the character string "god" into the Google search box just to see what happens. In a recent exercise, Google told me that there were approximately 3,150,000,000 results. That's right: more than three billion—with a *B*—results. As you know, Google also has a smart cousin who went to college called Google Scholar (scholar.google.com). When I searched for "god" there, I was presented with a mere 4 million results. One of the challenges that ministry students face in searching for authoritative information sources is the flood of knowledge, opinion, news, intentional disinformation, and pornography only two clicks of the mouse away on the Internet. The World Wide Web connects users to a cacophonous amalgamation of information in electronic form. If you have an Internet connection, you can look at the holdings of thousands of academic libraries and read official church documents. You can also read the latest conspiracy theory about who shot President Kennedy or the true origins of the coronavirus. The open Web, that part of the World Wide Web that is freely available, does not have an editorial board making judgements about the accuracy of purported statements of fact. My blog describing how I was abducted by aliens is just as accessible to you as a digitized copy of the Magna Carta or an early fragment of the Bible. My point is simply this: the open Web contains information, but there is no guarantee about the reliability of the information.

Judgments about the Reliability of Sources

When drawing judgements about the reliability of information related to your research topic, what factors should you consider? Complete the exercise below before reading the paragraph that follows. As a researcher you are not a blank slate. You have a wealth of background that you bring to the research enterprise. Draw upon that knowledge base now.

Reliable Information: Wheat or Chaff? When drawing judgements about the reliability of information, what factors do you think you should consider? Write down your thought process about assessing the reliability of the following sources. Imagine that you want to conduct a study about how Christians in your tradition pray by themselves outside of formal services, sometimes called private prayer. What do you think about the reliability of these four sources?

- Source 1: The book entitled *The Tree of Life: Models of Christian Prayer*, by Steven Chase. Published by Baker Academic (Chase 2005).
- Source 2: An article by Ruth Graham in *U.S. Catholic* about how praying the rosary exercises the brain (Graham 2014).
- Source 3: An article in a peer-reviewed journal by Sarah Bänziger, Marinus van Uden, and Jacques Janssen, entitled "Praying and Coping: The Relation between Varieties of Praying and Religious Coping Styles." It is published in *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* (Bänziger, van Uden, and Janssen 2008).
- Source 4: The book by Bishop T. D. Jakes titled *When Women Pray: 10 Women of the Bible Who Changed the World through Prayer* (Jakes 2020). Bishop Jakes is an African American pastor and best-selling author.

Here are my observations about these sources. I notice that sources 1 and 4 are books. I know a little about Bishop T. D. Jakes. For instance, I see his books in airports and Christian bookstores. I know that he is an inspirational Pentecostal African American preacher, sometimes described as a "megachurch" pastor (Pappu 2006). While I do not recognize the name Steven Chase, I know that his book is published by a well-known evangelical publishing house. I can confidently surmise that Chase's book went through a thorough review process before the publisher decided to print it. I also know that it is very likely that a book by Baker Academic will be reviewed by other scholars in a short article or book review in a magazine or journal. It will be easy for me to learn more about his book. Without reading any more than the titles of these books, I imagine that Chase's book will be more scholarly, and Jakes's book will be addressed to a popular audience. Sources 2 and 3 are articles. I think that the *U.S. Catholic* article appears to address Catholic readers; I think that the article published in *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* is addressed to psychologists and pastoral counselors who have a professional interest in how people cope with their lives and call upon prayer as a tool to do so. I know that "peer review" is a process used to keep poor or deceptive scholarship from taking up space in scholarly journals. I will say more about peer review shortly. Because sources 1 and 3 have gone through thorough review processes prior to publication, I would give them very high marks for reliability. I also would expect certain theological viewpoints to be expressed directly in sources 1, 2, and 4. What was your thought process like? What background knowledge did you bring to bear as you made judgments about the reliability of these sources? As you read, you should read critically.

Information Literacy

As we saw in the previous section, you are not merely searching for any information pertinent for your research interest, but for reliable, authoritative information. The skills that you use to discover, critique, and use information are called "information literacy" by librarians. Below are listed some key aspects of information literacy (Association of College & Research Libraries 2016).

Frames for Information Literacy

- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Creation as a Process
- Information Has Value
- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship as Conversation
- Searching as Strategic Exploration

Each of these six frames sums up a cluster of ideas about information used by students in higher education. For instance, the broad idea that information has value includes the reality of information as having legal protections such as copyright and trademarks. One appropriate practice associated with this idea is "give credit to the original ideas of others through proper attribution and citation" (Association of College & Research Libraries 2016, 16). We have already introduced the ideas of research as inquiry and scholarship as an ongoing conversation. Our focus here is on the final frame—searching as an exploration: "Searching for information is often nonlinear and iterative, requiring the evaluation of a range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues as new understanding develops." (Association of College & Research Libraries 2016, 22). As you search for appropriate sources, you should not be surprised if you discover that your first efforts at finding information (let's say, Googling it) do not provide you with satisfactory results. Experience shows that searching involves serendipitous discoveries (for instance: browsing the shelves of your seminary library) and more systematic efforts described in the next section. You will constantly be making judgements about the quality of information as you encounter new sources.

Searching: A Series of Iterative Steps

Below is a series of five steps to use when you are looking for appropriate information for your literature review and to make sense of the findings of your study. These steps present a sequence that I have found workable over the years. You can easily find hundreds of other versions of steps for finding information by looking at the library sections of websites of universities and theological schools. These aides will be written using the names of tools that are available to their patrons. I am using more general language. I am assuming that you have already thought about your research focus so that you don't need to start at the 50,000-foot level. More comments follow the list.

1. Using **Google** or your favorite Internet search engine, type keywords into the search box and see what you find. How helpful was Googling it?

2. Search your seminary's set of resources electronically. In some cases, you will use something called a discovery layer or **discovery service**. A discovery service searches for all the types of information sources available to you as a patron, including books and e-books, journal articles, and archival material. Your school's discovery service may have a name like EBSCO Discovery Service or WorldCat Discovery Service.
    a. If your seminary library does not have a discovery service, you will need to search the online catalog and databases of journal literature separately.
    b. Use key words and controlled vocabulary (more about the distinction below). Search for synonyms and near synonyms of keywords.
3. Ask yourself about the **adequacy** of what you are finding so far.
    a. Have I found information rooted in the theological tradition I am interested in for my study?
    b. Have I found information about empirical research on my topic, not just doctrines or editorial opinion?
    c. Am I satisfied with the reliability of my sources? Have I discovered scholarly peer-reviewed sources?
4. If the answer to any of the three questions above is no, **search** your school's set of resources **again**. Use different keywords. If you do not find controlled vocabulary to help you refine your search, do not suffer in silence. Consult a librarian. As you read resources that you have discovered, carefully look at the footnotes and bibliographies. These resources often can lead you to other pertinent sources.
5. **Stop** searching for information when you determine that you have sufficient information to read given the time constraints of other academic assignments and other demands on your time. Remember, conducting the literature review is only one part of the qualitative research process.

Let me flesh out the list in more detail. Step one, go ahead and use an Internet search engine like Google. I know that for many people in North America, Googling things is almost reflexive thanks to the twenty-first century's most popular prosthetic—the smart phone. Note what you find in your Google search. You may find gold and silver in Google. Regardless of what you find, do not stop there.

Step two, consult your school's resources. Universities and seminaries spend thousands of dollars a year on building up your access to high-quality information sources. The difference between your academic library, your public library, and all the books that you can browse online is the level of curation. The librarians at your school only spend money on materials that serve the curriculum of your school and the research needs of the faculty. A Baptist seminary collects different books, in general, than a Catholic seminary because each school tailors its collections of books, journals, and databases to its main patron base. Your seminary has paid for you to have access to bibliographic and full-text databases pertinent to the study of religion and theology. If you find an article or book that interests you by using your school's discovery service, you should be able to put your hands on the book (or your eyes on a digital version of a journal article) without paying any money for the transaction. You may discover the same article using Google but be asked to subscribe to the journal or

pay money to read the entire article. This barrier is known as the paywall. Generally, you can avoid hitting a paywall by going to your library's web site, then logging in to the system before searching. Once you are "authenticated" (i.e., recognized as an authorized user), your school will allow you to view and download content that the school has licenses for and has already paid for access.

This is a good juncture to talk about databases that are especially helpful to ministry students conducting qualitative research. For many years Atla (formerly known as the American Theological Library Association) has indexed periodical literature and multi-author works in religion and theology. As digital technology has developed, Atla has added full text to the metadata. As of this writing, the association's flagship products are *Atla Religion Database®* (*ATLA RDB®*), *AtlaSerials®* (*Atlas®*), and *AtlaSerials PLUS®* (*Atlas PLUS®*). Atla began focusing on Protestant sources but has increased the scope of the journals indexed and digitized over time. The former *Catholic Periodical and Literature Index* has been merged into the *Atla Religion Database®*. Since the late twenty-teens, Atla has worked to expand the geographical scope of its products to include more journals produced outside of Europe and North America. More material about religions of the world beside Christianity is also being indexed and digitized. In late 2020, *Atlas PLUS®* provided full-text access to more than 530 journals produced in 35 countries. Another product from Atla especially important to DMin students is *Research in Ministry®* (*RIM®*)—a free thesis and dissertation abstract database. It is a good place to look for examples of final DMin projects. The Theological Resource Exchange Network (tren.com) is another source for DMin final projects. TREN materials are available for purchase. Some, but by no means all, seminary libraries subscribe to TREN. It is sometimes possible to use inter-library loan for access to DMin final projects.

The databases discussed in the previous paragraph focus on religion and theology. Many libraries also subscribe to multidiscipline databases such as *Academic Search* (and variants) from EBSCO and *ProQuest Central™* from ProQuest. These databases provide full-text access to journals in a range of disciplines. Since anthropologists, psychologists, social workers, and sociologists frequently conduct research about religious practices and persons of faith, searching multidisciplinary databases helps ministry students find empirical studies relevant to their own research topics.

Consult your school's website (usually the library section) to discover which databases your school provides access to. A librarian will help you to refine your search strategies to make the best use of each database. To reiterate my earlier remark about librarian superpowers, conversations with your seminary's librarians will save you dozens of hours as you conduct your preliminary review of literature pertinent for your study. They want you to succeed.

In the list of five steps, I referred to searches using keywords and controlled vocabulary searching (step 2b). If I type the phrase "King Arthur'' in a search box, I am doing a keyword search. On the Internet, I will get results about King Arthur, all right, including the King Arthur who was a legendary British ruler and an employee-owned baking company headquartered in Norwich, Vermont. In a library online catalog, discovery service, or database interface, users typically have options to limit their search so that they do not retrieve search results about a baking company when they want results about the legendary king. Such searches use *controlled vocabulary*. Wonderful human beings called indexers have analyzed books and journal articles and created metadata (information about information) that notices, for instance, that a journal article has a title and two authors and is primarily about the third chapter of the Gospel of John. Because indexers have coded the names of the authors in a field called "author" and the name of the article in a field called "title," you can search for words that are only the names of authors or are contained in the titles of journal articles. A field is part of an electronic record that contains a value about a designated chunk

of information. The name of an author is coded to the author field. The title of an article is coded in the title field. Thus, for example, you can search only for books or articles by your favorite professor by typing his or her name in the author field. The ways that you limit your searches using controlled vocabulary vary, depending on the search interface that you are using. Often, you are given choices in a drop-down menu that will ask you to "Select a field." When you click on the "Select a field" button, a list of fields drops down. The table below shows some of the fields from the EBSCO Discovery Service.

Table 3.1 — Limiting Your Search by Fields: EBSCO Discovery Service (Selected)

Label	Field	Label	Field	Label	Field
TX	All text	TI	Title	SO	Journal title/Source
AU	Author	SU	Subject terms	AB	Abstract

By selecting which field to search in, you dramatically reduce the number of search results that you find once you hit the search button. Beware that controlled vocabulary searching works differently in different interfaces. The specific fields in one database may not be the same as in another database. The wording of a subject term (sometimes called a "descriptor" or simply "subject") might be called one thing in one database and something else in another. Even when using controlled vocabulary, searching for information in databases is an iterative process that involves repeated attempts to match just what you are thinking of with the way that human indexers and computer systems have stored the information that you need. Many systems have another way of filtering search results called limiters. A large set of search results can be winnowed down to, for example, articles published in academic journals by clicking on a limiter box. Or you can choose to view information only in Spanish or another language by clicking a limiter. As the Association of College and Research Library frames point out, the search for information is iterative and does not follow a straight line.

Step three in searching for information is quality control. As you search, you should monitor the quality and pertinence of the growing list of journal articles, books, and documents on websites that you are uncovering. If you have not found information from your theological tradition (diagnostic question 3a), think again about your choice of keywords and use of controlled vocabulary searching. Sometimes it is helpful to use a more general term than you may have been using (e.g., the term "devotion" is more general than "praying the rosary" or "mental prayer"). It is sometimes helpful to look at a church document or classic text to find search terms. Sometimes searching for information by a known theologian (using controlled vocabulary for an author search) or scholar is helpful.

Have you found empirical studies relevant for your project (diagnostic question 3b)? Only one or two? From an information-seeking point of view, you may find more sources by using the search term or terms ("search term" is a synonym for controlled vocabulary) that can lead you to what might be called research, a case study, field work, or the like. The controlled vocabulary can vary, depending on which database you are looking in. For example, while I was doing a literature review for a study about seminary students and money, I discovered a report on one empirical study about the stewardship of money was called "Motivations for and Obstacles to Religious Financial Giving" in the journal *Sociology of Religion* (Vaidy-

anathan and Snell 2011). Using the EBSCO Discovery Service search interface, I retrieved the full record for this article (i.e., a screen showing all of the metadata about it). I learned from the full record that the subject terms (SU) assigned to this article are “religion,” “generosity,” “typology (theology),” “wealth,” “Protestants,” and “qualitative research.” In this user interface, words or phrases in the field SU are the correct terminology—or controlled vocabulary—when looking for information in this tool. Reading the summary of the article (the abstract) in the record, I discovered that the article is about a study that linked “ethnographic and interview data with church-reported financial giving behavior.” Ethnography and interviewing are data collection techniques used—as you know now—in qualitative research. I learned a lot about this article even without reading it in full. Just as importantly, I know that, in the EBSCO Discovery Service database *Academic Search Complete*, there is a subject term for qualitative research. By using the drop-down menu for subject term (SU) in the search interface and typing “qualitative research,” I will retrieve metadata about information sources that an indexer determined used qualitative research as a method or that discuss qualitative research. Finding previous instances of empirical studies is very helpful for your literature review. Remember, you want to ground your qualitative study in previous research. If there is not much previous research, then your work can lay claim to a degree of originality. If you find a great deal of previous research, then you will be in position to discuss your study’s findings with a variety of previous studies.

The third diagnostic question (3c) is: Am I satisfied with the reliability of my sources? One of the six frames of the Association of College & Research Libraries, regarding information literacy, reminds us that authority is constructed and contextual. Specifically,

> Information resources reflect their creators’ expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required. (Association of College & Research Libraries 2016, 12)

The exercise earlier in the chapter (“Reliable Information: Wheat or Chaff?”) invited you to use your evaluative muscles to think about the factors you consider when determining how reliable and authoritative information is. Religious communities, for instance, sometimes defer to recognized leaders for rulings on what is allowable or forbidden behavior, or good and bad theological interpretation. As I write this chapter, I can see yard signs in my community that affirm “In this house we believe: Science is real; Black lives matter; No human is illegal.” Part of the reason why these signs have appeared is because the assent granted to scientific experts (such as the benefits of vaccinating children or how best to minimize the spread of COVID-19) is not uniform. Theological interpretations that are lauded as cutting edge and insightful in some denominations would be considered as fanciful or heretical in other denominations. My point here is that you will make determinations about how authoritative certain publishing houses, journals, or authors are based on a set of values that you have learned from your previous education, your formation within a religious or spiritual tradition, and your seminary education. Your conclusion that a given source is reliable or unreliable is thus an exercise of your critical judgement.

Step four: if you are not satisfied with the number and quality of sources that you have found, ask a librarian for help and think of new words to use when searching in library sources. On the other hand, if you are satisfied, you have researched step five. You have finished your search successfully.

Before moving forward, let’s review this chapter so far. We began by noticing that large, complex topics are best broken down into smaller subtopics for qualitative research studies.

Topics can be narrowed by using one theological lens and by specifying a particular group of study participants. Then we noted that research topics stand within a lineage of previous research and theological reflection. Researchers are expected to demonstrate the relationship between their new studies and previously published research. To make these links, researchers need to discover, read, ponder, and summarize previous research. This process is called the literature review. Searching for information leverages your existing knowledge base and human sources of expertise. You should make the most of information sources available to you as a student by using the library collection and set of databases curated for you by your school's librarians.

Research Design Approaches and Practical Theology

You have spent a great deal of energy thinking about what to study and why it matters. You also need to think about how you will conduct your study. The same literature review could support either a quantitative or qualitative approach. In this book, we focus on qualitative approaches. Yet, within the world of qualitative research, there is a baffling variety of research designs and methodologies. A particular "approach"—John Creswell's (2007) umbrella term for a way of conducting qualitative research—has an underlying set of philosophical (and/or theological) assumptions. He categorizes these assumptions as "ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical, and methodological" (15). It is beyond the scope of this book to tease out these five assumptions, much less to argue for or against discrete positions. Such an exercise might begin with pre-Socratic Greek philosophy, revisit Enlightenment claims about reason, and conclude in the kaleidoscope of options described as postmodernity (see Kuhn 1962; Rosenberg 2016). In my experience, ministry students and their professors (whether they understand themselves to be theologically conservative or liberal) are generally suspicious of approaches to research that rely exclusively on quantitative approaches and experimental designs. They are generally supportive of approaches that admit that human knowledge is partial.

Linking Research Design to One's Beliefs

Because the researcher has sworn allegiance (at least implicitly) to a given set of assumptions, the researcher's methods for data collection and analysis will be shaped by her assumptions. To say the same thing in terms of researcher positionality and the Tillichian-Wesleyan method of practical theology sketched in chapter 1, my understanding of how culture works and of the appropriate Christian answers to these cultural questions informs my choices as a qualitative researcher. That last sentence is a head cracker. To unpack it, please complete the exercise below. Do the exercise before reading my comments below.

> **Practical Theology and Research Design 1** Choose two of the three scenarios below. Choose one that is similar to your own beliefs and interests. Choose another that is dissimilar. For both scenarios, how might your theological commitments help you choose how to conduct a qualitative research study?

- You believe that more attention needs to be paid to the care of creation. Regardless of what politicians do, you believe that congregations should take concrete actions as God's people to bear witness to the value of land, water, and air. You are interested in conducting a study about congregations that share your belief.
- You believe that more attention needs to be paid to the care of creation. You believe that only bold policy decisions by governments and large corporations can limit the effects of climate change. You want to discover good practices that persons of faith can use to move policy.
- You are convinced that racism and White supremacy continue to harm persons of color in your country. As a Christian, you believe that God is on the side of the oppressed. In a required senior seminar in your MDiv program, you want to observe a local pastor whose ministry includes antiracism work.

The first two scenarios both identify care of creation as a topic of interest and have global climate change as a key reason for such interest. The imagined researcher for the first scenario wants to focus on congregational action. There might be several reasons for this: am I a minister serving a congregation, so that's "my" world? Perhaps I believe that Christians are in the world but not of the world (Jn. 15:19) and take the Anabaptist position that Christians should distance themselves from the larger culture or political action. The imagined researcher in the second scenario believes that faithful people should engage in politics. What do these beliefs mean for how to conduct a qualitative research study? In scenario one, the researcher would need to find an appropriate congregation and then choose methods to understand the congregation's activities related to creation care. For instance, if the congregation expresses care for creation by hosting a community vegetable garden, the study might interview lay leaders in charge of the gardening ministry. A researcher in the second scenario might observe how some believers influence corporate or government policy by advocacy.

The researcher in the third scenario is framed in language that echoes themes of liberation theology: God is on the side of the oppressed (Cone 1997; Gutiérrez 1996). Anti-racism frequently entails nuanced views on the nature of racism, power, and how change in attitudes and practices comes about (Barndt 2011; Kendi 2019). A small-scale study of a local minister involved in antiracism work might include techniques like interviewing and intentional observation.

In each scenario, the stance of the researcher is not completely neutral or disinterested. In each case, the researcher has faith-formed convictions. These convictions were formed by the four components of the Wesleyan theological quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. These convictions are put in conversation with issues of contemporary culture: climate change and racism. In each scenario, the researcher also seems to see qualitative research as providing clues about how to support positive change in the world—the significance of the study. Regarding methods of data collection, however, each researcher might use very similar techniques.

If you want more practice in thinking about how researcher positionality pushes on the decisions that a researcher needs to make about the design of a study, complete the next exercise as well.

Practical Theology and Research Design 2 For both scenarios below, how might the theological commitments of the researcher help them choose *how* to conduct a qualitative research study?

- You believe that capitalism is inherently violent. It is at odds with the social teaching of the Catholic Church. You believe that the best witness for Catholics is the formation of intentional communities of married and single laypersons that practice the sharing of possessions and renunciation of "success." You want to study such communities.
- You are a youth minister who believes that lives can be changed when teenagers unplug from their phones and experience Christian community in the countryside. You are worried that camping ministries may disappear if leaders do not respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. You want to study how camping ministries can make changes to respond to the global pandemic.

The first scenario is based on explicit theological beliefs. A research design for a study of intentional communal Catholic communities should write research questions that are overtly theological. Chapter 4 explains how to do that. Because the researcher wants to study communities that have articulated such beliefs and put them into practice, the researcher would need to know that there are such communities and that she has access to them. In the second scenario, the theological commitments of the researcher are less fleshed out. For instance, what is meant by "Christian community in the countryside"? The final sentence in the scenario seems loosely attached to researcher interest. It seems that camps that respond well to the pandemic will find ways to enable teenagers (somehow) to have unplugged camping experiences. For both studies to move forward, both topics need to be refined. In both scenarios, the positionality of the researcher is important. In the first scenario, the reason for choosing to study intentional communities is that the researcher considers them a good way to put faith into action. In the second scenario, the researcher's beliefs about the importance of being in the country focuses the study.

Research Design: Phenomenological, Liberationist, and Project Approaches

Qualitative researchers use a range of research designs. Creswell surveyed ten books about qualitative research and came up with more than twenty-four distinct approaches, including case studies, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and participatory action research (Creswell 2007, 6–8). Three broad approaches that are commonly used in qualitative research by ministry students are outlined below. Some of the approaches identified by Creswell can be considered specialized examples of approaches on my list. My way of talking about approaches to research design combines language from practical theology and the social sciences. Approaches for research design fall into three categories: ***phenomenological approaches***, ***liberationist approaches***, and ***project approaches***.

Phenomenological approaches value understanding a research area from the point of view of a group of participants (e.g., what church choir members think about being in the choir). At the start of a study, a phenomenological approach does not have in mind an agenda for how the results of the research might be used. They celebrate increased understanding of the phenomenon under consideration.

Liberationist approaches want to change the world for the better. Such approaches might be rooted in theology (Social Principles 2016) or in explicitly secular values (Hägglund, 2019). Liberationist approaches to research may use the language of advocacy, allyship, or justice-seeking. Conducting a study from an explicitly feminist perspective is a type of liberationist approach, since it explicitly values the flourishing of women in social structures

marked by patriarchy (Leavy and Harris 2018). These approaches sometimes seek to involve study participants in the work of deciding what human problem should be addressed (Reason and Bradbury 2013). As I use the term liberationist in this book, persons using a liberationist approach are not satisfied with things as they are. Thus, a conservative evangelical Christian who wants to protect the unborn and severely limit immigration into the United States would most definitely design a qualitative research study on either of these topics using a liberationist approach. She could be a liberationist just as much as progressive Christian who advocates for universal health care and severe restrictions on the kinds of guns that individuals may legally own.

Finally, *project* approaches are rooted in the desire to address narrowly identified problems faced by churches, ministers, or other religious professionals. While liberationist approaches want to shine the light of freedom and justice everywhere or re-order a world gone mad by ignoring God's intentions for humanity, project approaches are content to address smaller but real problems like improving youth ministry to bilingual children in a congregation, or how Christian chaplains can provide pastoral care to persons who practice no religion. Frequently, the final projects of DMin students fall into this third approach. Final doctoral projects often involve designing and implementing a set of activities, which the researcher then evaluates (Lincoln 1999). In this context, evaluation differs from other kinds of analysis and interpretation that researchers typically do. At this point, I am dramatizing the differences between the approaches to aid your thinking about research design. Distinguishing characteristics of a project approach for DMin students include its size (small), the length of time for completing the project (perhaps a year), and the requirement to build a method of evaluation into the project's design. A DMin student might bring liberationist or phenomenological commitments to bear in a final doctoral project but will still need to evaluate the relative success of her project. To put it another way, a distinctive feature of the project approach is inclusion of a plan to evaluate the effectiveness or impact of the project.

The way that a researcher constructs research questions, collects data, analyzes, and interprets them are shaped by the approach chosen. The table below compares some features of the three approaches to address the general research area of women studying the Bible together. Do not worry too much if you do not understand the technical terms used. We will address them later in the book. The parts of the research process in the left-hand column echo the steps of a qualitative study as sketched in chapter 1. For purposes of illustration, the example below assumes that this study might be a DMin final project.

Table 3.2 — How a Research Approach Shapes the Work of Qualitative Research (Topic: Women Studying the Bible)

	Approach		
	Phenomenological	**Liberationist**	**Project**
Topic Refined	What is it like to be a woman in a Bible study group?	How does Bible study liberate or oppress women?	How can women grow in their understanding of the parables of Jesus?

Table 3.2 — How a Research Approach Shapes the Work of Qualitative Research (Topic: Women Studying the Bible)

	Approach		
	Phenomenological	**Liberationist**	**Project**
Research Question	What themes do participants voice about taking part in a Bible study?	Who speaks and who is silent? How do women bring their experience to the biblical texts? Are women free to criticize the patriarchal dimensions of the Bible?	How do participants interpret Jesus' parables at the start of the project? How does their understanding change?
Data Collection	Interviews	Interviews Observation Journaling	Pre-test/post test Interviews
Intervention	—	—	Pastor/researcher designed a curriculum for use in a women's Bible class
Interpretive frameworks	Chosen after data is collected	Feminist theology	Researcher's theological tradition
Implications for Practice	Study valuable even if it only increases understanding	Important to all Christian women Empowering to participants	Important for work of other pastors and teachers

Different approaches influence how a researcher refines an area of study—in this case, women studying the Bible. The phenomenological approach wants to discover the experience of study participants. The liberationist approach addresses the role of the Bible in empowering or subjugating women. The project approach addresses an educational goal—increasing understanding of a part of the Bible.

The research questions differ by approach. The phenomenological approach uses open-ended questions about possible themes. The liberationist approach is concerned with the lived experience of women and patriarchy (in the text and in current society). Finally, the DMin might write research questions to fit the proposed ***ministry intervention***—a

curriculum for studying the Bible that the researcher/pastor will create. Only the project approach includes an intervention, in keeping with expectations for DMin final projects.

All three approaches might use interviewing as a method of data collection. The differences between the three approaches have to do with the framing of the study and the interpretation of data more than data collection per se. (I discuss how to choose techniques to collect data in the next chapter.) In my example, the pastor/researcher will attempt to determine how effective her ministry intervention is by comparing how participants understand Jesus's parables before and after they take part in the Bible study that she designs. Notice that the phenomenological approach allows the researcher to delay decisions about making sense of findings (via an interpretive framework) until data is in hand. Our hypothetical liberationist-approach researcher is committed to feminist values, while the project-approach researcher will rely on her church's theological tradition. Finally, notice that the phenomenological approach is less concerned with discerning implications for practice than the other two approaches. This stance is consistent with the phenomenological approach's overriding concern to increase understanding of the lifeworld of participants.

Thought Problem

- Does one of these approaches immediately capture your interest? Why?
- Do certain kinds of study topics fit one approach more than another?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?
- How might your choice of approach affect what you read in your literature review?

CHAPTER 3: KEY POINTS

- Researchers often move from a general research interest or passion to a smaller, more focused area to study. A topic can be narrowed by specifying a research setting, a specific possible pool of study participants, a particular theological viewpoint, or the use of a particular method.
- Reviewing pertinent literature on the researcher's topic helps the researcher put her project in the context of a larger scholarly conversation. The literature review helps the researcher identify what may be novel in her own study.
- Librarians, professors, and colleagues are experts who can point you to pertinent literature.
- Vetted sources like the catalogue of an academic library and peer-reviewed journals provide researchers reliable, authoritative information. By contrast, the open web is not curated.
- Novice researchers should meet with a librarian at least twice as they work on a literature review.
- Searching for information is an iterative process.
- In addition to deciding a research topic, qualitative researchers need to determine a coherent overall approach to the conduct of the study.
- The researcher's theological stance influences choices about research approach.
- Three broad approaches to research design are phenomenological, liberationist, and project.
    - The phenomenological approach seeks to increase understanding of lived experience.
    - The liberationist approach seeks to help people improve their lives.
    - The project approach is highly focused on a ministry problem.

CHAPTER 4

Getting Started 2

Research Questions, Methods, and Participants

Research questions framed from grounded theory ***look*** *different than questions framed from a phenomenological study.* [emphasis in the original]

– John W. Creswell (2007, 6)

The thin khaki line keeps the fate of Belgium from your hearth and home. Get into khaki now!

– Recruitment Poster, Canadian Army, 1914–1918 (Archives of the Ontario War Poster Collection)

In Chapter 3, we discussed initial steps in conducting a qualitative research study, focusing on deciding on a topic and becoming familiar with scholarly literature. We learned about three general approaches to conducting a study, rooted in theoretical and cultural commitments. As you will learn in this chapter, worrying about whether one uses a phenomenological, liberationist, or project approach matters because your choice of approach shapes how to identify the precise focus of your study using research questions.

This chapter does four things. The first section of this chapter discusses how to pose research questions and how they differ from hypothesis-testing—a traditional feature of quantitative approaches. Research questions shape what data the researcher needs to answer them and how the researcher ultimately makes sense of (interprets) her study's findings. As Creswell notes, there is a match between the approach used in a study (phenomenological, liberationist, or project) and the precise wording of research questions.

The second section of this chapter helps novice researchers think about the options for collecting data. In the world of qualitative research, these techniques are called by a variety of names: methodology, methods, techniques, or procedures. The researcher needs to choose a method that fits her overall approach and is feasible in terms of access to participants and the amount of time available.

The third section of the chapter talks about choosing and recruiting participants for a qualitative research study. The Canadian recruitment poster from World War I featured in this chapter's epigraph takes a hard-sell approach. Potential recruits should join up to protect the nation from the fate of Belgium—occupation by the kaiser's army. The Allied propaganda machine depicted that occupation in lurid detail, some of which was true and some of which was fabricated (Horne 2002). The poster is an urgent invitation to join the Canadian army. You will no doubt take a less dramatic approach to inviting individuals to take part in your study and cannot promise that taking part will rescue the homeland. I will discuss the challenges to making good invitations to the kind of people who fit the needs of your study.

Finally, the fourth section draws attention to the practicalities of data collection and the need to plan at the beginning of a study for the management and preservation of data. You will work hard to collect data. They are worthy of careful handling.

Creating Research Questions: The Key to a Focused Study

In chapter 3, I argued for the importance of trimming down a very large topic to a smaller size. You might not be able to study an entire solar system, but you can study one planet. Within the social sciences, a key way in which a given study achieves focus is to use ***research questions***. These questions (which take the form of questions just like in *Jeopardy*, the television game show) guide your data collection and how you interpret them. To put it another way, you collect data for the purpose of finding answers to your research questions. The three general approaches to qualitative research (phenomenological, liberationist, and project) require researchers to write research questions in different ways.

Research Questions: Phenomenological Approach

In a phenomenological approach, research questions are variations on the general question that such studies want to address: *what is it like*? In practice, research questions have components that state with specificity whose experience is under consideration and what aspects of their experience are of interest to the researcher. To dig deeper, consider the two research questions highlighted below. "RQ" simply means "research question."

> **RQ 1.** What themes do women at First Christian Church voice about being members of the church choir?
>
> **RQ 2.** Do seminarians at New Creation Theological Seminary identify an overarching message to their theological education?

The first research question implicitly identifies several parts of a hypothetical qualitative research study. The general topic is: what is it like to be a choir member? More specifically, the research is limited to the experience of women who sing in church choirs. Finally, the research focus is tightened even further by specifying one congregation. There might be several different ways to collect data in this study. However, posing the research question in this way makes clear that data should be collected from women who sing in the choir rather than from the choir director or congregants who hear the choir sing but are not themselves members. Notice that the research question does not directly show a relationship to the previous research that you discovered in your literature review, the significance of the topic, or why the researcher chose the topic. Crucially, the research question signals which aspects of the topic require the gathering of data. The researcher wants themes, so she will need to ask or observe participants speaking about being choir members. Research questions only make sense after the researcher has set up the project by determining its significance and finding out what other researchers have discovered on the topic.

The second research question was part of a qualitative research study that I conducted (Lincoln 2009). I made this research question part of my study because two published studies about the experience of seminarians indicated that theological schools have a dominant

message that they communicate to students through the school's culture. While the wording of this question differs from the first example, it is formally the same. The question relates to a general topic (being in seminary). The research is focused on one seminary. Finally, it is also clear that data to answer the question should be collected from seminary students, not the faculty or administrators.

Exercise: The General Form of Research Questions—Phenomenological Approach Based on the two examples of research questions provided above, write down a general form for research questions. In other words, what are the common elements of both examples?

A general form for research questions is: What *themes* do *study participants* voice about my research topic? A good research question asks about a given research topic from the point of view of some set of human beings who have experience of the topic. This general formula may spawn subsidiary research questions. For instance, a researcher who is curious about the differences and similarities in the experiences of women and men who sing in church choirs might re-write RQ 1 as:

> **RQ 1a.** What themes do women at First Christian Church voice about being members of the church choir?
>
> **RQ 1b.** What themes do men at First Christian Church voice about being members of the church choir?
>
> **RQ 1c.** How do the themes identified by the two groups compare?

To practice writing research questions in the form of "What *themes* do *study participants* voice about my research topic?" complete the exercise below. Afterwards, read my comments in the ensuing paragraph.

Exercise: Writing Research Questions for a Phenomenological Study You are a researcher interested in learning more about the experiences of participants in a women's Bible study group at Midtown Methodist Church (MMC). You want to learn about how women engage in reading the text and about other aspects of being in the group (such as friendship).

- Write at least two research questions.

The first research question (RQ) focuses on the "study" part of a Bible study group. It might be posed as:

> **RQ 1.** What themes do MMC study participants [all participants in a women's Bible study group] voice about studying biblical texts?

Another way to say the same thing is:

> **RQ 1.** How do MMC study participants describe the parts of their Bible study experience dealing with reading and discussing Bible passages?

The second research question should get at other dimensions of being in a Bible study group, whatever they might be. The research question might look like this:

RQ 2a. Besides reading and discussing the Bible, what is being part of the MMC women's Bible study group like?

Another say to get at the same focus of concern is:

RQ 2b. What themes do study participants voice about the social or spiritual dimensions of taking part in the women's Bible study group?

If the researcher intends to use observation as well as interviews, another research question might be:

RQ 2c. Based on observation of group interactions, what is it like for women to take part in the Bible study group?

The wording of this research question differs from the rest because the data collection method is observation, not interviewing.

As you read reports on qualitative studies, you will discover that research questions take many forms. Consider the three examples below. Notice how the authors write about the key foci of their inquiries.

Table 4.1 — Examples of Research Questions, Phenomenological Approach

Context	Research Questions in Publication
This study used interviews to explore the belief of those identifying as spiritual but not religious.	"The four themes I chose to examine [were] the sacred, human nature, community, and afterlife. . . . I did not set out to evaluate orthodoxy . . . I just wanted to know how my conversation partners thought about these things" (Mercadante 2014, 16–17).
In this study, researchers interviewed seventeen marriage and family therapists or interns.	"We are interested in examining how clinicians of diverse spiritual backgrounds use prayer in different facets of the therapeutic process" (Miller and Chavier 2013, 70).
The researcher interviewed twenty Presbyterian ministers. The researcher assumed that the ministers were trained to recognize psychosis as a mental illness.	"The primary research question was to what extent there might be consensus among pastors and pastoral counselors in the PC(USA) regarding what they might interpret as a mystical religious experience and what they might interpret as a psychotic experience. A subordinate question was on what basis participants interpreted the unusual experiences reported to them" (DeHoff 2015, 22–3).

In the first two examples, the researchers did not use the term research question at all. They spoke instead about the overall purpose for their studies. Mercadante's general statement about her interest in pursuing four themes might be re-written as four research questions (RQs) like this:

RQ 1. What themes did study participants voice about the sacred?

RQ 2. What themes did study participants voice about human nature?

RQ 3. What themes did study participants voice about the community?

RQ 4. What themes did study participants voice about the afterlife?

The third example, published in a psychology journal, used the formal heading "Research Questions" in the report. This example distinguishes between the primary research question (do Presbyterian pastors and pastoral counselors make distinctions between mystical experiences and psychotic ones?) and a subsidiary research question (On what basis do study participants interpret unusual experiences reported to them?).

> **Thought Problem** How might a researcher write research questions for a phenomenological study using observation as a data collection technique? How do they differ from research questions for a study using interviews to collect data? Why?

Research Questions: Liberationist Approach

In a liberationist approach, specific research questions are written in ways that honor the researcher's theological and ideological commitments. Many high-quality studies that are rooted in the liberationist approach do not state research questions (such as: Brennan-Ing, Seidel, Larson, and Karpiak 2013; Eidoo 2018; Russell and Bohan 2016) or state research questions with the (presumed) disinterest of the phenomenological approach. The examples below are taken from studies rooted in liberationist approaches. The abbreviation "LGBT" refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons.

Table 4.2 — Examples of Research Questions and Research Question Surrogates, Liberationist Approach

Context	Research Questions in Publication
An after-school program for Muslim girls and women who were resisting Islamophobia in Canada.	"Conceptual tools offered by feminist and ethnographic approaches to citizenship studies and a critical faith-centred epistemology guide my study. . . . I listened to participants' life stories for insights into how and why they had come to their [political] activism [and] the range of issues of injustice that concerned them" (Eidoo 2018: 513, 515).
Ethnographic study of a Protestant congregation that had become a visibly LGBTQ-supportive church.	"Action toward LGBT equality may often be influenced by sexual prejudice and may thus recapitulate longstanding power dynamics between majority and sexual minority groups" (Russell and Bohan 2016, 335.

In the first example, the researcher clearly identifies feminist and critical epistemology as shaping her study, which focuses on women and girls actively confronting injustice. In the second example, the researchers focused on sexual prejudice and power. Russell and Bohan used ethnographic procedures (participant observation and analysis of documents obtained from the church) to collect their data. I classify these studies as liberationist because the researchers understand that their work supports combating injustice. Eidoo (2018, 516) states, for instance, "I believe that being a slightly older Muslim researcher engaged in activ-

ist work, with a vested interest in disrupting hegemonic master narratives about Muslims, powerfully structured my access to participants." In their discussion of findings, Russell and Bohan (2016, 334) looked for implications to support "genuinely egalitarian action on behalf of LGBT equality." Neither of these studies is rooted in impersonal, scholarly curiosity.

As the careful reader has noted, the researchers who conducted these two studies did not state formal research questions. It is a good practice for novice researchers to do so because research questions help the researcher focus her data collection, sharpen her analysis, and guide writing the formal report on findings.

Exercise: Writing Research Questions for a Liberationist Approach Try your hand at writing some more research questions, this time for studies using liberationist approaches.

- Write two research questions for the study undertaken by Eidoo reported in the previous example (Eidoo 2018). Do not be put off by your level of knowledge about epistemology or theory.
- You are a researcher interested in learning more about the experiences of participants in a women's Bible study group at Midtown Methodist Church (MMC). You want to learn about how women engage in reading the text and about other aspects of being in the group (such as friendship). You come from a feminist stance, concerned for the flourishing of women in all aspects of life. Write at least two research questions.
- As a parent and a Christian, you believe that children become confused when exposed to religious diversity before they can read the Bible well and confess their faith in Jesus Christ. You want to interview parents of children who are homeschooled, attend Christian schools, or attend public schools. You would like to discover data that supports your beliefs, values, and assumptions.

In the first case, the research questions (RQs) might look like this:

RQ 1. How do Muslim girls and women talk about their experiences of injustice?

RQ 2. How do Muslim girls and women talk about their political activism?

In the second case, the research questions could be written like this:

RQ 1. How do members of the MMC women's Bible study group go about reading the biblical text?

RQ 2. How do members of the MMC women's Bible study group talk about the ways that group participation supports their full humanity as women?

RQ 3. Based on observation of group interactions, what are the social dimensions of being part of the women's Bible study group like?

In the third case, the research questions could be written like this:

RQ 1. What themes do Christian parents express about preventing their children from being confused by exposure to non-Christian viewpoints?

RQ 1a. What themes are expressed by parents who homeschool their children?

RQ 1b. What themes are expressed by parents who enroll their children in Christian schools?

RQ 1c. What themes are expressed by parents whose children go to public schools?

RQ 2. How do these themes compare?

RQ 3. Are children who are homeschooled or enrolled in Christian schools prevented from learning about non-Christian religious ideas?

Notice that the research questions specify the study participants, who will become the experts from whom the researcher gathers information (by interviews or observation). Notice as well that the specific research questions explicitly relate the passions of the researcher—how they want the world to be changed.

Research Questions: Project Approach

The project approach, commonly used in DMin final projects, differs from the phenomenological and liberationist approaches because a researcher using this approach designs and implements a ministry intervention and then evaluates its efficacy. The ministry intervention is, in some sense, a short-term experiment. The DMin student wants to know how successful the experiment was. The project is "an adventure within a safe environment" (Sensing 2011, xxviii). In the hypothetical example in chapter 3 of women studying the Bible, the researcher using the project approach wanted to help women in a Bible study grow in their understanding of the parables of Jesus. The researcher designed a curriculum for use in a women's Bible class (the ministry intervention). The research questions (RQs) for such a study may be stated as:

RQ 1. How do participants interpret Jesus's parables at the start of the project?

RQ 2. How does their understanding change after using the researcher's curriculum?

Depending on the curriculum designed by our hypothetical researcher, the second research question could be expanded as follows:

RQ 2a. After studying Jesus's parables using the researcher's curriculum, how do participants understand Jesus's parables in the context of the biblical text?

RQ 2b. After studying Jesus's parables using the researcher's curriculum, how do participants interpret the parables? Are they allegories, stories making one point, intentionally open-ended?

RQ 2c. After studying Jesus's parables using the researcher's curriculum, how do participants make connections between the parable and their own lives?

The elaboration of the second research question depends on what the researcher teaches during the experiment/ministry-intervention part of the project. Although the research questions that I've written do not use the term evaluation, the practical effect of collecting data before and after the ministry intervention and comparing them serves as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of the project. If the researcher is highly invested in demonstrat-

ing the effectiveness of a particular pedagogical approach to Bible study, such as her denomination's study materials, research questions might be written to highlight the approach. Thus she might hypothetically write:

> **RQ 1.** How do study participants interpret Jesus's parables at the start of the project?
>
> **RQ 2.** How do study participants interpret Jesus's parables after using the Lutheran Women, Learning Women Bible Study module on the parables?
>
> **RQ 3.** How effective was the module in increasing student understanding of Jesus's parables?

This set of research questions has the virtue of stating an RQ about evaluation clearly (RQ 3).

> **Thought Problem** Does the practice of posing research questions as literal questions that are answered by data make sense to you? What are the characteristics of good research questions?

What about Hypothesis Testing?

In the social sciences, some researchers do not employ research questions as I have sketched them here. Instead, they pose hypotheses. An *hypothesis* is a formal statement regarding what a researcher thinks will or will not be discovered to be the case once data are collected and analyzed. An hypothesis is frequently posed to test a theory. In the social sciences, a ***theory*** is simply an explanation for why certain things happen in the way that they do. In other words, a theory attempts to explain a repeated pattern in data. For instance, why does the price of gasoline go down and not up when there is an abundant supply relative to demand? According to the economic theory of market equilibrium, the price of gasoline (or any other good or service) stabilizes when the supply exactly matches the expressed demand. Sometimes social science theories are expressed in terms of a model that accentuates factors found to be important and ignores other factors that do not have predictive power. Here are three examples of hypothesis testing taken from social science research. Each of them grounds the hypothesis for their study in previous research or a theory.

Stating an Hypothesis: Three Examples

1. "Women in seminary, as opposed to men, are expected to be more likely to desire, or to seriously consider, ministerial positions that have low-status congregants and clients, in small communities and churches, and with direct personal interaction" (Finlay 1996, 313).
2. "From the review of the literature discussed above it can be proposed that transformational leadership styles were significantly and positively related to outcome criteria, over and above transactional leadership (research hypothesis)" (Rowold 2008, 405).

3. "[W]e predicted on the basis of patterns of behavior in other immigrant groups and the use of Driedger's model whether the Coptic churches would likely follow the assimilation patterns of the Calvinist churches" (Van Dijk and Botros 2009, 194).

In each of these three examples, there is a statement about what researchers imagine will happen. In Finlay's study, she anticipated that women would consider taking ministerial jobs in certain kinds of churches more than men. Rowold anticipated that transformational styles of leadership would be more efficacious than transactional styles, based on the findings of previous research. Finally, Van Dijk and Botros imagined that Coptic churches would be assimilated into Canadian culture in a manner similar to the way that Calvinist churches had been. Each of these hypotheses was grounded in previous research. After collecting and interpreting data about immigrant Coptic churches, Van Dijk and Botros concluded that the changes in the life of immigrant churches in Canada (both older Calvinists and more recent Copts) was consistent with Driedger's conformity-pluralism model (Driedger 1996). Thus, their stated hypothesis was confirmed by study findings.

Don't be put off if you don't know very much about research on women in ministry or leadership styles or how immigrant religious communities change over time. My point here is to contrast posing an hypothesis with stating research questions in one's study. Researchers who state hypotheses generally have a deep understanding of previous research and explanations (theories and models) for research findings. However, one of the joys of doing qualitative research using research questions is that you can conduct a robust study that discovers new elements in the experience of individuals and congregations. You don't need to "have a hunch" or place a theoretical bet as part of a study. You do not need to state an hypothesis. You can simply study "what it's like" using research questions shaped by a phenomenological research approach. In the same way, research questions can also be written for studies using liberationist or project approaches without the need to proffer an hypothesis based on previous research findings or a theoretical model.

As we will discuss in detail in chapter 9, the researcher must interpret study findings (data) whether the study began with research questions or hypotheses. Your research questions become the framework for interpreting data and writing a formal report.

Selecting Data Gathering Techniques

In the world of qualitative research, techniques that researchers employ to find the answers to research questions are called by a variety of names: methodology, methods, techniques, or procedures. To make matters even more confusing, it is common for some qualitative researchers to refer to a research approach and the data gathering methods by the same name. An excellently egregious example is *ethnography*. Sometimes ethnography names a conceptual framework combined with a set of data gathering techniques, as in feminist ethnography (Craven and Davis 2013); sometimes ethnography means only a method of data gathering (Pelto 2014); and sometimes "an ethnography" is an article or book-length write-up of a study by an anthropologist, sociologist, or practical theologian (Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and Marler 1997; Fletcher 2013; Labanow 2006).

In this book, we will use "data gathering techniques" as the general term for tools used to collect data from study participants. Interviewing and focus groups are in chapter 5 and observation in chapter 6. Researchers using all these techniques also collect data from participants using questionnaires (e.g., to provide background information about participants such as age, religious affiliation, etc.). They frequently examine written sources that shed

light on the community that is the focus of the study (e.g., the researcher studying a non-profit organization would examine the organization's mission statement and fundraising materials). The researcher needs to choose a method that fits Her overall approach and is feasible in terms of access to participants and the amount of time available. As a practical matter, the researcher needs to figure out which data gathering techniques to use during the design phase of the study so that she knows how she wants to engage and invite study participants: a sixty-minute interview? a ninety-minute focus group? observation of congregational worship for six months? The researcher should create consent forms that specify precisely what participants are in for if they say yes. Researchers using a phenomenological, liberationist, or project approach may use identical data gathering techniques. At many schools, the researcher will need to provide samples of consent forms, questionnaires, and interview protocols to the school's institutional review board (IRB).

How do you decide which techniques to use? Your thinking about possible techniques happens as you think about whittling down your topic from quite large to the small-enough. Of course, you need to be aware of the range of data gathering techniques used by social scientists and practical theologians. I hope that your motivation to become a researcher carries you through the upcoming chapters (5–7) that describe techniques in detail. As we have seen, narrowing a topic often involves limiting the scope of the study to an identified organization such as one congregation. By writing research questions in the form of "what themes do a set of persons at organization X identify about my topic?" you have already made a choice about possible participants. A research question in this form also fits interviewing (whether individual interviews, focus groups, or both) as the data gathering technique. If you write a research question in the form of "how do a set of persons at organization Y *go about* my topic?" you have written a research question that may fit the technique called observation. For instance, if you want to know "how the youth leadership team at First Presbyterian Church in Yourtown makes decisions," you might choose to observe their meetings. You might also ask them. In this case, you might use two data gathering techniques (observation and interviewing).

To continue your thinking about selecting appropriate data gathering techniques, please complete the exercise below. A focus group (in the third scenario) is a group interview. Qualitative researchers often use focus groups to collect data because the researcher gets the several participants' viewpoints at once and gains the benefit of hearing the group discuss the topic of interest.

Exercise: Selecting Data Gathering Techniques You are a professional church worker taking a graduate-level class about leadership. You have been assigned to study how the youth leadership team at First Presbyterian Church in Yourtown makes decisions. You know a minimal amount about the research setting. You are a skilled pastoral counselor and know that you are good at that kind of interviewing. Write down ideas about which data gathering techniques you might use in the study for each scenario below.

- Your access to possible study participants is limited to phone calls or video technology like Zoom.
- Because your congregation has granted you a two-month sabbatical, you will be able to spend many hours with study participants in face-to-face settings.
- Your face-to-face access to study participants is limited to a four-day window. You know that leading a focus group might be helpful, but you do not think that you are skilled at running a focus group about the decision making process.

The first example is the most constrained. The researcher will have no face-to-face opportunities to meet participants. It is still feasible, however, to conduct individual interviews. By using video technology like Zoom, the researcher would be able to see and hear those interviewed and record the interviews for later review. If the leadership team is small, the researcher might interview them as a group via Zoom. The second example opens a wide range of possible techniques, including interviewing and observation. The third example assumes a tight timeframe to collect data. It might be possible to conduct a focus group and conduct several individual interviews in four days. It might also be possible to observe the leadership team in action. If a researcher does not feel confident in his ability to use a method like leading focus groups, what should he do? Sometimes the answer is: use the technique I am accomplished at. Sometimes the answer is: learn by doing. No one is born with the set of skills to run a focus group according to the canons of twenty-first-century social science. One learns by doing. For each scenario, the researcher should also ask about access to written materials related to the study. In this instance, these materials might include formal committee minutes and summaries of planning meetings that might be helpful and available.

This is a good place to comment on the relationship between real-world constraints of data collection and how researchers write research questions. If my only available data gathering techniques are interviewing Yourtown church leaders rather than making observations, my research questions might best be posed as: How do youth leaders at First Presbyterian Church talk about their decision making process? With greater time available (as envisioned in the second scenario), you might add a second research question: Based on observation, how do youth leaders at First Presbyterian Church make decisions? Perhaps you might add a third research question: How do the themes voiced by study participants and the practices of leadership observed compare?

To reiterate: a researcher needs to understand the range of data gathering techniques possible in qualitative research so that she can make an informed decision about which techniques fit her study.

Recruiting Participants

This section discusses how to attract individuals to be part of a qualitative research study. You need to invite participants whose background and experiences help you answer your research questions. You need to tell them enough about your study so that they can give informed consent and you can spur their interest. This section discusses how a qualitative researcher establishes a pool of participants based on the requirements of purposive sampling. The same principles for establishing a pool apply to a study conducted at a single site or multiple sites. In practice, inviting participants is a negotiation between the researcher and others, including persons with the power to allow or disallow access to participants: gatekeepers. After successfully negotiating with gatekeepers, the researcher issues formal requests to potential participants. The discussion about informed consent started in chapter 2 is continued, followed by a discussion about what motivates and rewards study participants.

Purposive Sampling and Participant Pools

Qualitative research studies use ***purposive sampling*** rather than random sampling. A purposive sample consists of persons who have the desired characteristics for a given study. It is not necessary that everyone possessing the desired characteristics have the same probabil-

ity of taking part in the study. Purposive sampling differs from the random sampling commonly used in quantitative research studies, which attempt to generalize findings widely. To review the differences between these two sampling methods, please complete the exercise below.

Exercise: Sampling Methods In the hypothetical research studies below, identify which kind of sampling the researcher is using. In every case, the researcher has a list of names and current contact information for all MDiv graduates from Central Texas Seminary for a ten-year period (2009–18). There are 515 graduates.

- The researcher wants to send a survey to fifty persons, so she picks every tenth name on the list starting from the end of the alphabet.
- The researcher wants to interview graduates now serving in Austin, Corpus Christi, and El Paso about their experiences as pastors. There are fifteen graduates in Austin, eleven in Corpus Christi, and five in El Paso. She sends invitations to five graduates working in each city.
- A researcher wants to compare the experience of women and men in ministry. She will conduct two focus groups of 12–15 persons each. She determines that there are 300 female graduates and 215 male graduates. Because she is interested in those who have at least four years of ministerial experience, her list of possible participants has shrunk to 190 women and 122 men. She prints out the names of the women and has her ten-year old son draw 20 names out of a hat; she repeats this procedure for names of the men. She invites the forty persons chosen.

Of the three examples, only the first approximates randomly choosing participants who meet the minimum requirements for taking part in the study. Each person has a roughly one in ten chance of being selected. In the other two cases, there is not an equal likelihood that a given individual will be selected. In the second case, all five of the graduates in El Paso are invited (100 percent chance). The probability of a Austin graduate being selected is only one in three (5 out of 15—33 percent). In the third case, the probability of a woman being selected is roughly one in ten (20 out of 190 equals 10.5 percent); the probability of a specific man being selected is roughly one in six (20 out of 122 equals 16.4 percent). Despite giving her son an interesting activity, the result does not meet the standard of truly random sampling.

But take heart. There is no cause for alarm in methods used in the second and third cases, provided the researcher understands that *she is not using random sampling*. Randomness is not the point of qualitative research studies: qualitative researchers want to speak with persons who can tell them about the phenomenon that is of interest to the researcher as defined by the research questions. Qualitative researchers do not claim generalizability of findings based on the rules of inferential statistics (see chapter 1). The researcher is not claiming what pollsters claim when they randomly select a representative number of households in a state, ask them their preferred candidate for governor, and then claim that their poll confidently predicts the voter preferences of *all* voters in the state within a stated margin of error. Instead, a qualitative researcher simply claims: here is what I found within the constraints of a study. I wanted to talk with people of a certain background (graduates of Central Texas Seminary) about a certain subject (their experiences in ministry). If my findings have legs that carry them to other places (i.e., if they suggest to you that similar results would be ob-

tained in similar settings or that my interpretation of findings hits home), that would also be wonderful.

The group of all possible participants for a given study is called the ***pool*** (similar to a pool of potential jurors for a trial). In a qualitative research study, the researcher wants to recruit participants that have certain characteristics that make them helpful to the researcher. For example, in a study focused on the effects that going to Bible camp have on the faith development of teenagers, the pool consists of those who have gone to a Bible camp when they were in their teens. (If I interview summer staff at Bible camps and ask them about the effects of going to camp, well, that's a different study because it has a different class of participants.) If a researcher wanted to study the spiritual lives of widowers, never-married single men and men whose spouses were living would not be part of the pool.

Exercise: Who Is in the Pool? Think about possible participants for the four studies described below. Write down your ideas about eligibility before reading my comments below.

- A study of the life-work balance of female pastors who are raising children.
- A study of bivocational pastors in the Rust Belt.
- A study comparing how Protestant and Catholic churchgoers hear sermons.
- A study of the decision making processes at First Lutheran Church, Anytown, South Dakota.

For the first study, participants clearly must be women and be "raising children." They also must be pastors. To sharpen the definition of eligible participants, a researcher might further define what "raising children" means. Are children limited to persons under age 18? Must the children be living full-time with their mothers? Similarly, the researcher might also want to define whether or not "pastor" means full-time work in ministry and whether pastor means "head of staff" or "senior pastor" in larger settings. Would hospital chaplains be in the pool? Upon reflection, a researcher might redefine the pool to be female pastors who 1) serve full time in congregational ministry or chaplaincy and who 2) have at least one child under the age of 18 living with them on a regular basis.

In the second study, the researcher would need to ***operationalize*** which specific places constitute the Rust Belt. If the researcher means persons who work in areas with high poverty or high rates of unemployment, less metaphoric language would help define the pool of participants. If she means pastors who serve in certain states in the American Midwest, those places should be named. She would also want to give a working definition of bivocational. As with the previous example, the word "pastor" might mean a minister of Word and Sacrament (to use Lutheran language) serving in any number of ministry settings.

The third study, about churchgoers, seems to have a very large pool. There is a lot of room for more precise definitions. Who qualifies as a churchgoer? Does the researcher want regular churchgoers? Given current patterns of participation in congregational life, it is important to define who counts as a "regular" attendee: almost every Sunday? Twice a month? Catholics and Protestants live around the world. Presumably, the researcher also wants to limit the scope of the pool to a certain or specific geographical area. How would you operationalize Catholic churchgoers if you were a priest serving two congregations and wanted the study to focus on those parishes?

The fourth example has a very limited pool—a single congregation. By getting more specific about what the researcher means by decision making, the researcher could narrow the

pool even more. For instance, in some churches a clearly known set of elders or congregational council members are formally authorized to make certain kinds of decisions. The pool is well defined and small. If the researcher wanted to get at the overlap between formal and informal decision processes (office holders are not the only persons who exercise power in congregational life), then the pool becomes larger and harder to operationalize, or the pool effectively consists of members of the congregation whose opinions are taken into account when formal leaders make decisions.

When thinking about the participant pool for a study, the researcher must also not weed out potential participants based on levels of physical ability or health status. In keeping with the concepts of universal design and accessibility (Rios, Magasi, Novack, and Harniss 2016), a research study should be conducted to include as many persons as possible. For instance, some of the church leaders at First Lutheran in Anytown might have mobility, vision, or hearing issues. The researcher in that case would need to make suitable accommodations so that decision makers who wished to take part in the study would be included. I will say more about accommodations later in this chapter (when I discuss issuing invitations) and in chapter 5 (interviewing).

Operationalizing Definitions of Participant Characteristics

Complete the following exercise to practice thinking about how to operationalize characteristics of participants for qualitative research studies. Good definitions are as free of jargon as possible and lack ambiguity.

> **Exercise: Operationalizing Characteristics with Precision** Write working definitions for these participants and settings:
>
> - New pastor
> - Young pastor
> - Good Sunday school teacher
> - Small-, medium-, and large-sized congregation

A "new pastor" might mean one recently ordained for the purposes of a study about the transition from seminary to ministry. An adequately operationalized definition might be: "For purposes of this study, a new pastor is one who has been ordained within the past three years." For a study about ministerial transitions, "new" might mean new to a given ministry setting. An adequate definition might be: "For purposes of this study, a new pastor is one who has been serving in her or his ministry setting for no more than two years." Sometimes your literature review will help you operationalize characteristics of interest. Your goal is to write definitions in such a way that potential participants can know whether they qualify for your study. If your definition departs from what previous researchers used, you need to explain to yourself, your professors, and readers why you wrote the definition as you did.

How did you operationalize a "good" Sunday school teacher? Important factors to consider include teaching experience, opinions of parents (and students!), direct observation of classroom activities, adherence to doctrinal standards, and willingness to take part in teacher training events. Let's not forget persistence: showing up to teach. It might be possible to operationalize the kind of person that the researcher is hoping to recruit by stating something like: "For purposes of this study, I want to interview Sunday school teachers who meet

at least two of the following criteria: 1) are currently teaching Sunday school; 2) have taught Sunday school for three years in a row, 3) have attended one or more teacher training workshops sponsored by their denomination, 4) professionally, are preschool through high school teachers, or 5) have been identified as a good teacher by a congregational leader." It would be important for the researcher to keep track of which participants met which criteria.

Several examples in this list need numerical definitions. For instance, many denominations have standardized definitions for different-sized congregations. The Presbyterian Church (USA) classifies the size of congregations using ten categories, ranging from 1–50 members at the low end and 1,601 or more at the high end (Presbyterian Church USA n.d.). It may make sense simply to define small, medium, and large using a commonly known standard. The researcher must exercise judgment about picking numeric values to operationalize definitions. Knowing the reported number of members for a given congregation, for instance, is a different measure than knowing the average weekly worship attendance. If I wanted to compare opinions about worship between worshippers in small, medium, and large congregations, it might make sense to operationalize the size using average attendance figures rather than membership counts. To make matters more complicated, large churches may have several services on a Sunday morning. An early service at a large church might be "small enough" to compare to the only worship service at many churches in the same fellowship or denomination. If I have a hunch that people attending smaller services will have a greater sense of intimacy than those attending services with hundreds of other worshippers and I care about feelings of closeness in my study, it might make the best sense to define small, medium, and large based on attendance and not membership. I hope that completing this exercise has alerted you to the challenges of giving precise definitions to everyday words. When you do not find useful ways to operationalize participant characteristics from your literature review, by all means ask for help from your professor or run ideas by other students whom you respect.

Thought Problem: From Everyday Language to Operationalized Definitions Write working definitions for these participants.

- Long-time member, new member
- Experienced spiritual director
- Active member of Anytown Church
- Young families

How Many Participants Do I Need?

Many ministry students learning about qualitative research have a vague memory of taking a statistics class that included discussion of how large of a sample size was needed for a robust study. While such considerations are important for quantitative studies that use inferential statistics, qualitative research uses purposive sampling. There are few a priori rules in qualitative research about the number of participants needed to conduct a robust study because qualitative research is frequently focused on the texture of human experiences, not broad-brush analysis. Qualitative researchers are not concerned about asserting that conclusions in one study can be confidently applied to other situations that were not

part of the study. What is at stake here? Imagine that a group of churches started a summer day camp. The camp was open to whoever wished to attend. The leaders of the program had a special concern that the camp serve "the least of these" in their community. They meant families with few economic resources. These leaders want to interview adults and children from those families to discover what worked well for them and what did not. If it turned out that the program served twelve children from seven such families, the universe of people to interview about the program (the pool) would be relatively small. But the small number precisely equals "one hundred percent" of the relevant individuals. In our hypothetical case, the study would be poorer if other people were interviewed simply to make the number of families larger. To cite another hypothetical example, if I wanted to study what current deans at Lutheran seminaries in Canada and the United States think about their work life, I would not need to interview many persons. In qualitative research, bigger is not necessarily better.

When considering how many participants are needed for a study, a key question has to do with the researcher's availability to conduct the study. In my work with DMin students, more than one has not finished a final project because they decided to include so many people in the study that they were unable to analyze the data that they collected via interviews. Transcribing interviews is a best practice for qualitative research, but it is challenging to find enough time to transcribe everything. A professional transcriber spends four to eight hours transcribing an hour-long interview, depending on the quality of the recording. It takes more time to transcribe a focus group session because there are multiple speakers. "A novice transcriber will require more time to accomplish the same tasks" (Guest, Namey, and Mitchell 2013, 285). Let the researcher beware.

Another way of thinking about the number of participants required for your study is to start with your research questions: How many participants do I need to answer my research questions well? Complete the following exercise. Use your imagination liberally.

Exercise: How Many Are Needed? How many participants would you want to conduct a qualitative research study on these three topics? What is your reasoning process? Use what you know (e.g., the number of pastors of my denomination working in my region) as you think about the questions.

- A study of the work-life balance of female pastors who are raising children in my region.
- A study of bi-vocational pastors or priests in my denomination/tradition in my region.
- A study of how pastors or priests in my denomination/tradition working in my region attend to their spiritual lives.

In each of these cases, you may know that the potential number of participants is not a large number in absolute terms. In some denominations, less than half of the total number of pastors in a geographical area would likely be women; the number of female pastors who have children at home would be a fraction of that fraction. If you live in an urban area, there may be literally hundreds of potential study participants for the third example. If you live in a less densely populated area, the number of potential participants might be small. What about a circumstance where there are only one or two people who fit your study criteria? If the researcher's concern is limited to one region and one denomination, then the study could go forward with very few participants. (Of course, the researcher would need to explain

in their writing why he chose to limit the study as he did.) The number of participants in a qualitative study is not the most important indicator of rigor.

Negotiating with Gatekeepers

In qualitative research studies, a researcher frequently encounters persons who have the power to grant or block access to potential study participants. Such persons are gatekeepers. In a study that I once conducted at several theological libraries, I requested permission to interview staff at a certain library and was denied permission because, according to the library director, "my library has been studied enough." Library directors in other places were interested, so the study proceeded. It is important for novice researchers to keep in mind that a wonderful opportunity for the researcher to learn interesting things may be interpreted by gatekeepers as an odd request from a stranger to upset the normal workflow of my organization or interrupt the comfortable rhythm of events in a congregation. By the time a researcher has designed the study, she will be able to explain the virtues of the study to gatekeepers so that she receives access to the people she needs to talk to. The researcher should be prepared to provide gatekeepers with answers to the following questions:

- Who is the researcher? The researcher should explain his or her institutional affiliation and credentials. Being a student enrolled in a seminary program is a credential that often grants a certain amount of legitimacy.
- What is the purpose of the study? The researcher needs to have a concise statement about the reasons for conducting the study. Such reasons often include that the study is a class assignment or part of a final doctoral project.
- Precisely which persons does the researcher wish to invite? The researcher needs to explain not only the kind of persons, but how the gatekeeper is expected to be involved in recruiting them.
- What will participants do? The researcher should know whether participation means individual interviews, focus group participation, being observed, etc.
- How, if at all, will the study benefit the gatekeeper, the gatekeeper's organization, and participants? The reasons why a gatekeeper grants permission might differ from the reasoning of individual participants. For instance, some gatekeepers might be moved to grant permission for a study because it will help leaders in a denomination even though this motive might not occur to individuals. If the gatekeeper is a pastor of a congregation or head of a chaplaincy department at a hospital, she will bear responsibility for making sure that persons under her care are not harmed by taking part in the study. According to the ethical principle of justice, some benefits should accrue to those that take part. A gatekeeper will want to hear your explanation.
- How will reputation, privacy, and confidentiality be maintained? To protect the gatekeeper and participants against potential embarrassment, the researcher should briefly explain how data will be protected and results reported.

To reinforce the idea of gatekeepers, complete the following exercise.

Exercise: Identifying Gatekeepers Who would need to grant you official permission to conduct a study involving the groups of potential participants listed below?

- Worship leaders at Yourtown Community Church
- Members of an interdenominational ministerial association
- Professors in the religion department of a Christian college
- Teachers at a church school
- Children attending Yourtown Community Church school
- The priests of a Catholic diocese

In the first example, it might be possible to contact worship leaders directly. However, it would be wise to contact the lay leaders or pastor of the congregation. If the worship leaders are paid staff rather than volunteers, the person able to grant you access might be their supervisor. In the second example, the person to contact might be the president, board chairperson, or steering committee of the association. In the third example, the first approach might be made to the chair of the department. If she did not feel authorized to grant you access, she would direct you to the proper person (perhaps the academic dean). In the fourth example, the principal of the school would be the logical person to approach to ask for permission for the study. In the fifth example, the principal of the school might be the gatekeeper. He might also confer with a parent advisory board. Finally, in the sixth example, the logical person would be the bishop, who is responsible for supervision of the regular clergy of his diocese. In every case, the gatekeeper is a person who has the power to grant or block access to study participants. Even after a gatekeeper has granted permission, remember, the researcher must invite participants individually and explain the purpose of the study. Potential participants are entirely within their rights to say yes or no as they see fit.

To help you think about initial contact with gatekeepers, consider the two examples of email below. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?

First Contact with Gatekeepers: 1

To: pastor@anytownchuch.net

Dear pastor:

I would like to interview some of your church members for a class project. I am a student at Central Texas Seminary. The attachment provides details of my project. What would be a good time for me to speak to you about this project?

Yours,

Eager Student
estudent@centexsem.edu

First Contact with Gatekeepers: 2

> To: pastor@anytownchurch.net
>
> Dear Rev. Nicholson:
>
> For a project in my stewardship class at Central Texas Seminary, I would like to interview five members of your congregation. I will make a presentation about my interviews at the end of the semester. The names of individuals will not be used. My professor, Dr. Chip Graham, suggested that I do interviews at your church. You may reach Dr. Graham at 555-555-000 or graham@centexsem.edu. What would be a good time for me to speak to you about this project?
>
> Yours,
>
> Eager Student
> estudent@centexsem.edu

The first email says very little about the purpose of the study. It does not specify how many church members Eager Student wants to interview, nor what use she will make of the interview material. Presumably, some of those details are contained in the attachment. The pastor will need to be motivated enough by reading the email to open and read the attachment. The second email addresses the pastor of Anytown Church by name (which suggests that the researcher has done a little homework) and suggests that Eager Student's professor knows Rev. Nicholson or knows something about the congregation. The second email states the number of those to be interviewed and what the researcher will do with findings (make a presentation). Although it is not stated directly, the researcher seems to be interested in learning what congregants have to say about stewardship. The second email also provides contact information for Dr. Graham so that Rev. Nicholson could verify that this email is a legitimate request and ask for more details about the project (and, perhaps, the abilities of Eager Student). In both emails, Eager Student wants to initiate a conversation. Neither email goes into detail about the content of interview questions, how many interviews the researcher would like to conduct, or how the researcher wants Rev. Nicholson to assist in finding participants. Gaining access to participants is a process; a telephone call or face-to-face discussion is a good setting for addressing these details. Once the researcher receives approval, it is a good practice to write a summary as a written record of the gatekeeper's approval. A sample of such a document is below.

Documenting Gatekeeper Approval

> To: pastor@anytownchurch.net
>
> Dear Rev. Nicholson:
>
> Thank you for granting me permission to interview five members of Anytown Church during the fall semester for my class project under the direction of Dr. Chip Graham. As we discussed during our meeting on [date], I have permission to:
>
> Recruit participants in the church newsletter and during announcement time at worship on Sunday, [date].
>
> Use a Sunday school room to conduct interviews.

> I will obtain written consent from church members. In my report on the project, no names or identifying information will be included. Only Dr. Graham and I will know the name of the congregation.
>
> For my records, please reply to this email so that I know that I have correctly understood the details of your approval.
>
> Yours,
>
> Eager Student
> estudent@centexsem.edu

It might be possible for a ministry student to discover potential participants for a study without going through a gatekeeper. For instance, the congregation might have a membership directory online. Perhaps the student knows someone who attends Anytown Church and that individual could provide contact information for other members that might be suitable. This method of recruiting participants through a chain of informal contacts is sometimes called the dirty snowball method. There are ethical reasons to ask permission from recognized leaders even in cases where it might be possible to find participants without going through formal processes for being granted access. A researcher should show respect. Asking permission from the gatekeeper and participants acknowledges that the researcher is not part of the research setting about which he is curious. Asking permission thus exhibits humility. Behaviors that might be interpreted as “getting around” congregational officials could damage relationships between the seminary and a congregation or between a pastor and a professor. Circumstances regarding gaining appropriate access to participants are different when a researcher is conducting research in his or her own setting. This type of project commonly happens in DMin final projects in DMin programs. I will have more to say about the ethics of doing research in a setting in which the researcher is also a leader in chapter 11.

To continue to use the example of a student researcher seeking permission from Rev. Nicholson, the good reverend might tell Eager Student that she must secure permission from congregational leaders. Even if the minister can grant permission, a conversation with leaders can clarify specifics of the study, such as a timeframe that fits the needs of the student researcher and the participant pool. Attempting to hold a focus group on New Year’s Eve or Super Bowl Sunday afternoon is unlikely to be convenient for everyone, including participants. Another benefit of discussing the request with gatekeepers is that potential participants may contact the gatekeeper to check whether the study is legitimate and that the gatekeeper knows about it. In a best case scenario, the gatekeeper becomes enthusiastic about the study and asks the researcher how they can help with recruitment.

Issuing Invitations

Once permission has been secured from gatekeepers, the researcher needs to issue invitations to suitable participants. It is important to issue invitations in ways that reach the correct people, explain the purpose of the study, specify the expectations of participation, and talk about the risks and rewards of participating. First, invitations need to reach the correct group of people. Sometimes a local gatekeeper can provide the researcher with access. For instance, invitations to take part in a study may be printed in Sunday worship bulletins and sent out with weekly church newsletters. The researcher may be able to make an in-person

announcement at a worship service or Bible study. The researcher may also be given contact information (email addresses or phone numbers). Second, the researcher needs to explain the purpose of the study and what is expected of participants in a way that potential participants can understand. The Canadian recruiting poster at the start of this chapter asked for sacrificial commitment with an economy of words because most everyone seeing the poster would have been aware of the Great War. It would have been very likely that potential recruits were already pondering whether to enlist and “get into khaki.” When you conduct a study, you and your supervisor are the only persons who have given it serious thought. Your study will be a brand new idea to your potential participants. Thus, you need to explain to potential participants why they should participate in your work.

As an exercise, try writing an invitation for Eager Student’s study about stewardship. What would you write for a church bulletin? Then, compare your invitation to the one below.

Sample Invitation 1: Student Seeks Members for Stewardship Study

> Giving of time, talent, and treasure is an important part of Christian faith. You are invited to share your experience in a one-hour interview conducted by Eager Student from Central Texas Seminary. Ms. Student will share your stories (no names) with other seminary students as part of a class on stewardship.
>
> For more details, talk to Rev. Nicholson or send an email to estudent@centexsem.edu.

How does your invitation compare? The sample hints that the reward of the study is simply the opportunity to share one’s Christian experience. The length of the commitment is stated so that participants know what they would be getting themselves into. The sample ends by mentioning both the email address of the researcher and the pastor’s name, signaling that Rev. Nicholson is on board with the study. Notice that the sample never uses technical terms like qualitative research or confidentiality. More detail will be shared with participants when the researcher obtains informed consent. Now let’s imagine that Rev. Nicholson takes a shine to Eager Student and provides her with contact information for several members who, in their pastor’s opinion, would be great people to interview. In such a case, Eager Student’s first email contact might look like the text below.

Sample Invitation 2: Student Seeks Members for Stewardship Study

> Dear Ms./Mr. [Name],
>
> I am a student at Central Texas Seminary. I would like the opportunity to learn about your experiences of sharing time, talent, and treasure for a class that I am taking. Rev. Nicholson, who has given permission for me to contact members of Anytown Church, suggested that I contact you because of your work on the stewardship committee. I’d like to interview you for one hour sometime in the next month. In my report to class, I will not use any names or other identifying information. I look forward to speaking with you.
>
> Yours,
>
> Eager Student
> estudent@centexsem.edu

Notice the difference in tone between the first and second samples. The first sample used an economy of words, like a want ad in a newspaper. The second sample is more intimate, in part because it leverages the fact that Rev. Nicholson has had a conversation with Ms. Student and identified a group of people to contact. Like the first sample, the second sample invitation briefly states the purpose of the study and promises anonymity. The second sample also specifies the length of the possible commitment (one hour).

Participants: From Invitation to Informed Consent

After issuing an initial invitation to a potential participant, the researcher needs to negotiate the specifics of participation to the satisfaction of the participant. A participant may want to know more about the details of the study. For instance, terms like focus group and research reports may puzzle participants. Sometimes a participant may be hesitant when they hear the term "focus group" because she had a bad experience in one. She may need some reassurance from the researcher about what exactly will go on at the event. If the researcher intends to record an interview (a good practice), the researcher should alert the participant in advance. A participant may want to look at the interview transcript or receive a copy of findings. The researcher must decide if she is willing to comply with this request. In some studies that I have conducted, the methodology made it simple to construct a small report just about a given participant's ideas. Some participants wanted "their own" report; some did not. Regardless of the good intentions of a participant, if the only times available to meet with the researcher conflict with other obligations of the potential participant, that individual will most likely not participate. It is important to make participation as convenient as possible. For instance, being able to provide childcare could make all the difference in whether or not some participants take part in study activities. In my experience, Doctor of Ministry students underestimate how much time they need to collect data for final doctoral projects. A key factor that slows things down is finding workable dates for an interview or a focus group.

The researcher should not assume that everyone who expresses interest in participation has 20/20 vision, good hearing, or the ability to walk easily. After a study participant has expressed interest, it is helpful for the researcher to provide added information about the details of study participation and invite the participant to express the need for any modifications to fit their particular circumstances. The sample from Eager Student below provides a template.

Sample Follow-Up Email for Individual Interview

> Dear Ms./Mr. Name,
>
> I am glad that you wish to take part in my study of stewardship. My plan is to conduct an interview lasting no more than one hour. The meeting will take place in the congregational hall on the first floor of the building. I will ask you to sign a written consent form. The bulk of our time together will be spent in a conversation. If there is something that I can do to make the interview comfortable for you, please let me know.

Sample Follow-up Email for Group Interview

Dear Ms./Mr. Name,

I am glad that you wish to take part in my study of stewardship. You will be part of a group interview about stewardship lasting approximately 90 minutes. The meeting will take place in the congregational hall on the first floor of the building. During the meeting, participants will be asked to view pictures on a display screen, write words on cards, talk with each other, and move around the room. If there is something that I can do to help you participate fully, please let me know.

Exercise: Getting to Yes with Study Participants To push your thinking about negotiating with participants, consider the three scenarios below. Write down your ideas in a sentence or two. Keep in mind that there isn't a single right answer.

- A researcher has made a broad invitation for participation in a study, specifying the kind of persons who are eligible. After he has begun interviews, Ms. Jones leaves two voice messages and sends three emails to the researcher asking to take part. The voice message notes that she "has a lot to say" on the subject. The researcher also gets an email from his supervisor indicating that this individual contacted the supervisor because the researcher hadn't responded to her emails. Ms. Jones is clearly qualified to take part in the study. The researcher is somewhat concerned about the enthusiasm displayed. How should the researcher respond?
- While talking with a potential participant, a researcher conducting a study in a congregation is told by Mr. Smith that he wants to take part in the study because he has been appointed by "several people" who are concerned that the researcher isn't being told the truth. How should the researcher respond?
- Ms. Anderson, who is the mother of young children, agrees to be interviewed on the condition that the interview take place at her apartment. The researcher knows that Ms. Anderson lives in the part of town with the highest crime rate in the Anytown metropolitan area. According to the approved design of the study, the researcher will conduct all interviews on Anytown Gospel Church's campus during weekday office hours. How should the researcher respond?

In these three scenarios, all the potential participants have met the criteria to take part in the study. In the first two cases, the researcher has reason to think that the potential participants are eager—maybe too eager. In the first scenario, I don't think that having "a lot to say" should disqualify participation. A researcher should hope that every participant has a lot to say. In this case, it would be important for the researcher to ensure that this participant is treated the same as others. For instance, if the study design calls for taking part in one focus group and then having one 90-minute interview, then Ms. Jones should not be given a longer interview than others. In some cases, a person might express interest in participating after the researcher thought that she was finished collecting data. In such cases, the researcher needs to decide if saying no is preferable to hearing from another participant.

The second scenario will set off warning systems of seasoned pastors, who are wary about shadowy groups and self-appointed spokespeople. In this case, the researcher should make it clear that Mr. Smith is welcome to express his views—as are other participants. It would

be a good idea to review the conditions of participation and the purpose of the study with Mr. Smith. Does Mr. Smith understand how results of the study will be used and by whom? The researcher needs to clarify how she will analyze data and respect the confidentiality of participants. If Mr. Smith would take part in a focus group using the rule of confidentiality (what happens in the focus group stays in the focus group), the researcher should stress that Mr. Smith would need to be willing to hold things that group members said in confidence and not report them back to the several people who felt authorized to appoint him as their spokesperson. The researcher might also seek advice from a supervisor in this case.

The third scenario raises two kinds of problems for the researcher. First, meeting the conditions set by Ms. Anderson fall outside the stated limits of the study. It is not unusual for IRB's to specify the location of interviews in the interest of protecting interviewees. Interviewees are thought to be safer when they are interviewed in a building where others are present than when they are alone with the researcher. So, the researcher would need to check with a supervisor for approval of a deviation. Is the researcher concerned about personal safety? Surely a researcher has an ethical duty to protect herself. On the other hand, does the researcher intend to limit participation to those who can get to Anytown Gospel Church during the work week? The researcher might be able to find other ways to accommodate Ms. Anderson's need to watch her children so that she can participate. For instance, it might be possible to offer childcare at the church or pay for a babysitter at Ms. Anderson's apartment. I didn't need to use very much imagination to create these examples. Novice researchers should be ready to accommodate the needs of study participants without compromising the integrity of the study. Without participants, the researcher has no data. Without consistent treatment of study participants, the integrity of the study is put at risk.

Obtaining Informed Consent in Face-to-face Settings and the Online Environment

Because qualitative researchers respect study participants, in face-to-face settings, the researcher needs to devote as much time as necessary to explain the purposes of a study, how the participant will contribute, the risks of harm, and how the researcher will work to prevent harm to participants throughout the research process. In face-to-face settings, the best practice is to provide each participant two consent forms printed out on paper. After reviewing the content of the form and having the opportunity to ask questions, the participant signs and dates both copies. The researcher collects one and the participant keeps the other. The researcher should obtain written informed consent at the start of an interview or focus group. See chapter 7 for a discussion of obtaining informed consent in studies using observation.

Thanks to the Internet and survey software like SurveyMonkey, researchers can collect data from persons that they would not otherwise have known about. In the online environment, obtaining consent commonly consists of asking participants to affirm their willingness to participate (that is, to answer survey questions) by reading a short paragraph about the study and then clicking yes or no. Below is an example, taken from my own research about the lifeworlds of ministers (Lincoln 2020). For part of the study, I invited graduates of several seminaries to take part in the study via email. When participants clicked on a link in the email, they arrived at a welcome page of a SurveyMonkey questionnaire identifying me as the principal researcher (with email address) and explaining that the study was approved by my school's IRB. Potential participants then saw the information in the example below.

Consent Form for Online Data Collection

> You are being asked to participate in a research study whose purpose is to understand the experience of ministers and how seminary professors think about the work and life of ministers. Specifically, you are invited to complete an online questionnaire. Completing it takes about fifteen minutes.
>
> The questions ask for rather harmless information. Should you feel uncomfortable in answering, simply stop and close the browser window. All information that you provide will be used for research purposes only. Any identifying information about you will be removed in any reports. The research data for this study will be stored in password-protected locations on secure computer networks.
>
> I consent to participate in this study. ☐ Yes ☐ No

If a participant clicked "No," she was led to a thank you screen and invited to close the browser window. If she chose "Yes," she was led to the body of the questionnaire.

In an online environment, the mechanism for obtaining consent is part of the mechanism for data collection: the survey software itself. When obtaining consent face to face, a researcher typically has a document called consent form, which participants sign. A participant providing consent online will most likely make a spontaneous decision about participating rather than contacting anyone with follow-up questions about specific concerns. Thus, consent obtained in this way seems consistent with the weak view of consent: a participant is trusting that the researcher and the researcher's sponsoring institution are worthy of trust. The justification for providing a modest amount of information about a study is that the possibility of harm to participants is considered minimal. If the researcher wants to conduct an hour-long interview or series of interviews with a participant using Zoom, for instance, then it becomes important to encourage the interviewee to ask questions about the study or the nature of the interviews. If I am recording the interviews (a feature of video conferencing software), I am collecting highly individualized personal data about that person: her face and voice. Even though the researcher ought to store digital files carefully and delete them after transcribing the interviews or completion of thematic analysis, there are more risks to the interviewee if the researcher collects data via Zoom than via SurveyMonkey. In cases where the participant is consenting to the capture of her likeness and voice, a prudent researcher might send potential interviewees a consent form as an email attachment, have the participant sign it, scan it, and return it to the researcher.

Regardless of how consent is obtained, the researcher needs to provide enough information about the study to ensure that participants understand the risks of taking part in the study. In the case of online studies about preferences for the format of library materials (printed codex books versus e-books), for instance, the risk entailed to a study participant is no greater than everyday life. The more sensitive the topic, the more important it is for the researcher to demonstrate to potential participants that the researcher will minimize the risk of participation.

> **Thought Problem** Obtaining informed consent is a lot of work for the researcher. What is at stake for the researcher? For the study participant?

As a best practice, the researcher should include ***qualifying questions*** at the start of the online questions. By doing this, the researcher ensures that those answering fit the cri-

teria for the study. The researcher also does participants the courtesy of discovering that a participant does not meet the criteria right away so that non-qualifying participants do not waste their time answering questions of no use to the study. Survey software allows for "forked" follow-up questions. Thus, if a participant answers a qualifying question in a way that fails to meet a needed criterion for participation, the participant is shown a "thank you" screen. Only participants who meet all criteria are asked the full range of questions. I will discuss the art of ordering questions in surveys in more detail in chapter 6. To think more about writing qualifying questions for the online environment, complete the exercise below. Write down your own ideas before reading my comments below.

> **Exercise: Qualifying Questions** Imagine that you want to conduct a study about the experiences of committee members in congregations that moved from face-to-face meetings to video conference meetings (e.g., via Zoom) because of the global pandemic. Imagine further that you have received email addresses for all committee members from three local churches in your tradition. You know that committees in all three churches moved from face-to-face to online meetings. What do you need to learn from possible participants so that you know that they meet your criteria for participation in your study?

When asking qualifying questions, the researcher wants to ask enough questions to know that everyone taking part in the study is appropriate as determined by the researcher. In other words, the researcher needs to make sure that she has a purposeful sample. Sometimes these initial questions can also provide answers to background questions that could help you interpret findings later. In this hypothetical example, the three churches are named First, Second, and Third Unitarian Church. Write possible qualifying questions as shown below.

Qualifying Questions for Members of Church Committees

In this study, I want to explore your experience as a member of a church committee during the unusual circumstances of the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 and 2021. Your congregation might call a committee by names such as "taskforce" or "workgroup." For purposes of my study, a committee is a formally elected or appointed group of church members that engage in a clearly defined task, such as overseeing Sunday school, working for social justice, or managing the congregation's money.

To begin, please answer the following questions:

[1] Which church do you belong to? Pick only one.

☐ First Unitarian

☐ Second Unitarian

☐ Third Unitarian

[2] Were you part of a committee for your church at any time during 2020–21?

☐ Yes

☐ No

In the example, selecting the "No" response to the second question would send the potential participant to a screen thanking them for answering the questions. I chose to describe my research interest and provide my definition of committee before I asked any questions. Sequencing the information in this order helps avoid confusion. Since I would want to know which participants belonged to which congregations, I asked this question up front. My third question would be phrased along the lines of: "What committee or committees did you belong to during 2020–21? Please choose all that apply." This question would only be asked if the answer to the second question is "Yes." Does my example look like yours? To reiterate, in the online environment, the researcher needs at some point to ask a "forking" question. Participants who answer "Yes" (because they meet the researcher's criteria for participation) are directed to the main set of questions. Those who answer "No" (because they do not meet eligibility criteria) are thanked and exit the instrument.

Motivations and Rewards

In this section, we have discussed how the researcher moves potential study participants from initial interest to informed consent. To conclude, I need to say a few words about motivations and rewards. Each participant has her own set of reasons for agreeing to take part in a study. According to research, some participants are motivated by altruism, the desire to help other people (Cook, Melvin, and Doorenbus 2017; Peel, Parry, Douglas, and Lawton 2006). Research on a person's motivations who agreed to be part of large-scale public health studies conclude that participants will consent to provide data if a trusted agency conducts the study or if the subject of the study has been important to their family (Slegers et al 2015). Those who have lost family members to pancreatic cancer, for instance, are often interested in taking part in a study that focuses on that disease. In some cases, individuals are genuinely flattered that someone wants to hear what *they* think. During interviews, I frequently say to participants, "Remember, there is one expert in the room: you!" I have gotten used to seeing people pause, blush, or protest that they could not possibly be an expert on anything. For many people, simply being taken seriously provides them a reward for taking part in a study (Lakeman, McAndrew, McGabhann, and Warne 2013). In some cases, people will want to take part in a study because they have an axe to grind or think that the researcher can help solve a problem for them. The researcher may not discover these motives until they begin an interview. I will discuss how to respond to situations like this in chapter 5 (interviewing individuals and conducting focus groups).

Managing and Preserving Your Data

Once upon a time in the twentieth century, I took a basic unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). The setting was a mental hospital. CPE was considered revolutionary in its infancy because it gave pride of place to talking with troubled souls—living human documents in Anton Boisen's (1936, 185) phrase. During my CPE training, we used the technique of writing verbatims—more or less word-for-word transcripts of pastoral conversations with hospital patients. About once a week, each student chaplain would bring a verbatim for discussion by the training group. In those days, recording a conversation meant using a tape recorder. Several times I successfully recorded a conversation and played it back several times so that I could transcribe it for the group. One memorable day, however, the technology failed me. I had been talking to a patient who was giving an elaborate explanation of his inner world, in

which he was the king. After a half an hour, I looked down to see the machine chewing up the tape. I had no documentation of my interview. I was mortified but survived.

In retrospect, this incident was my introduction to the challenges of managing research data throughout its lifecycle. A researcher needs a plan for collecting and managing data from a very early point in the design of a qualitative research study. The data that you collect can be considered by its medium (pieces of paper like consent forms, audio files from interviews, word processing files containing notes and transcripts) or by the role that it plays in the study. Consent forms are necessary pieces of data, for instance, but you typically only need to store them once you have gained consent. You may constantly refer to files containing notes or transcripts, on the other hand, while you analyze data and write up findings.

Outline of a Data Storage System

Managing research data includes managing information about the characteristics of study participants and the data in the form of recordings, transcriptions, notes made by the researcher, and more refined distillations of data. There are many ways to manage these data. The table below shows one example (from the mind of a card-carrying librarian) of a simple approach that uses only your favorite word processing and spreadsheet software.

Table 4.3 — Data Storage System for a Qualitative Research Project

Kind of Data	Type	Storage	Retention
Proposal	Word processing file	Digital	School rule
IRB Approval	Word processing file	Digital	School rule
Email correspondence	Email	Digital	School rule
Participant Consent Forms	Paper form or scanned as PDF	Filing cabinet or digital	School rule
Participant Characteristics	Paper original or transcribe data to spreadsheet	Filing cabinet or spreadsheet	School rule
Voice recordings of participants	Sound file	Digital	Destroy after transcription
Interview transcriptions	Word processing file	Digital	School rule or longer
Field notes	Paper or word processing file	Filing cabinet or digital	School rule or longer
Photographs, video	Image file	Digital	School rule or longer
Online questionnaire responses	Spreadsheet or PDF	Digital	School rule or longer

At most schools, there is a policy requiring that certain materials be retained for a set period of time. For instance, if students do a short observation for a class, the materials need to be retained by the student until at least the end of the term. It is common to require materials for a doctoral dissertation or DMin final project to be retained for several years after the end of the study. Retaining these primary documents allows instructors or experts to challenge findings or ensure that students were not cheating. Systematically curating data rewards the researcher because a good system of data management simplifies the process of data analysis, interpretation, and writing up the results of research. Throughout this book, I use the term "results" and "findings" as synonyms.

As a first step in thinking about collecting and managing data, consider this exercise. Jot down your thoughts, then read my comments below.

> **Exercise: Sadder but Wiser, but Still Quite Sad** Imagine a study in which the key research question asks, "How do women and men who engage in youth ministry understand their roles?" After conducting a dozen interviews with youth ministers, the researcher discovers that some, but not all, of the study participants talked about how their views about their role had evolved with experience. The researcher wondered if all these statements came from highly experienced youth ministers and if there might be a critical mass of experience (e.g., four years) that led youth ministers to voice this theme.
>
> The researcher reviewed "intake" forms for each study participant. He had asked participants about their gender, denominational affiliation, and educational background but not how many years of experience they had as youth ministers. What should the researcher do? What lessons can you draw from this example?

In the exercise, the researcher knew that it would be important to know which participants were women and which were men, since the overarching research question addressed gender differences and similarities. I can sympathize with the analytic discovery that something seemed to be going on related to ministerial experience—a factor that the researcher had not anticipated. In this hypothetical case, it might be possible for the researcher to contact participants again and ask some follow-up questions about years of experience and depth of experience. It might also be possible to review other parts of transcripts to see if participants themselves told the researcher about the depth of their experience as youth ministers. Researchers need to find a balance between asking participants enough questions about their backgrounds to make sure that they qualify for the study and asking so many questions that participants become weary. I also know from experience that the more intake or background questions you ask about an individual, the more likely you are to get partially answered or blank questionnaires returned to you. It doesn't hurt to stress to participants that answering every one of these mundane questions is extremely helpful to the researcher.

At the initial design stage of your qualitative research study, it is important to think about various aspects of a person's autobiography (sometimes called participant characteristics) that are pertinent and possibly pertinent to a specific study. Participants can quickly answer some autobiographical questions using simple checklists. The list below shows several background questions that might inform your interpretation of study findings later.

Possible Questions: Please Tell Me About your Background

- Age
- Gender
- Formal education
- Church affiliation
- Level of involvement in congregation
- Are you a convert?
- Years of experience
- Income
- Marital status
- Political views
- Hobbies
- Are you a parent?
- Are you a grandparent?

Each of these questions might be answered quickly by study participants in a variety of ways. For instance, researchers can ask about age by asking "in what year were you born?" or using a range of options (e.g., under 18, 18–35, 36–54, 55 or older). Some questions might serve as screening questions to determine eligibility for further participation in a study. For instance, if a study wants to explore attitudes of those who have never married, then it is important to ask those questions right away to save the time of potential participants and the researcher.

Some questions might be potentially embarrassing to participants—for instance, asking about one's level of involvement in a congregation. If knowing about the participants' degree of activity in the life of a community is important for purposes of a study but awkward to ask about, the researcher might have access to that information from other sources without directly asking the participant. In studies with participants from several different settings of interest to the researcher, I have not asked "which church do you attend?" or "Where did you graduate from seminary?" because I knew in advance. However, I used different-color paper on background forms so that I knew, for instance, that all the light green forms come from First Unitarian members and all of the light blue forms come from Second Unitarian members. It would be important for the researcher to write the question or questions about congregational involvement in ways that do not imply praise or rebuke. I'll say more about that in chapter 6.

In a study involving repeated interviews with the same individual, some important aspects of each participant's background will only emerge during the interview process. For instance, in some settings, it might be considered rude to ask a person on a form whether or not they "were a convert," (i.e., whether or not the person had once belonged to one part of the Christian church and then changed membership to a different fellowship or denomination) but, after building rapport during interviews, asking such a question would be heard

as far more invitational. In such cases, it is wise not to ask these kinds of questions on an initial intake form.

Keeping Participant Records

To manage various data about study participants, it is a good practice to keep a record of basic information about every participant in a standardized way. I have found that spreadsheet software (e.g., Microsoft Excel) is useful. Commonly used categories become cells in a table, such as:

- Participant identifier: The identifier is not the person's name, but it is linked to it. At the simplest level, an identifier might be a simple number—05 or 102. I will say more about constructing helpful identifiers below.
- How did this individual participate? In some studies, a participant may have been interviewed, taken part in a focus group, provided feedback about a performance, etc. Sometimes the same person takes part in a study in several ways. Track all the ways that a participant took part.
- Dates of participation
- Date that the participant gave informed consent
- Contact information (e.g., email address)
- Answers to qualifying/disqualifying questions
- Answers to brief questions about background such as age, gender, denominational affiliation
- Notes: It is a good practice to have space to write notes to yourself about each participant. The content of notes ranges from reminders like "I need to send a thank you email" to comments about participation, such as "Dropped out of study after the first interview because she moved away."

I've suggested that the participant identifier be something other than a person's name. I use these identifiers to label consent forms, interview transcripts, questionnaires, or written comments from focus groups. An identifier helps to mask the identity of the participant, in case for some reason a printed transcript gets left behind in a coffee shop or hotel room. Just as importantly, by constructing the identifier in an artful way, you can remind yourself about who this person is as you analyze data. Consider identifiers in the form: 101-01 and 201-02. I used identifiers formatted this way when conducting a study comparing the experiences of first and second career seminarians. I used 10x to signify anyone who was a first-career student (defined, in that case, as under 35 at the time of matriculation into seminary). I used 20x to signify second-career students. Moreover, the second part of the identifier indicated women (01) and men (02). If I was working on interview data from participant 101-01, I knew that the data came from a first career female student. Similarly, I would know that participant 201-02 was a man and a second-career student. By setting up the personal identifiers in this way, I quickly got my bearings during data analysis. Several years later, I returned to the data set with an interest in comparing the seminary experience of women

and men. Because of how the identifiers were set up, I could easily figure out how to separate data by the gender of the participant.

Because of how computers work, there are other practical advantages to using numeric rather than alphabetical identifiers. Computers are often better at sorting numbers sequentially than at alphabetizing letters or letters and numbers.

> **Thought Problem** How might you create identifiers that would help the researcher be easily reminded of a participant's church affiliation, age, and gender?

Linking Participant Names, Consent Forms, and Data

If your school's institutional review board were to decide (and I hope that they don't!) to audit your research process, you might be asked to document that you obtained informed consent for everyone who took part in your study. As an ethical researcher, you want to know this too, and you also want to provide the highest degree of anonymity possible to participants.

There are several ways to demonstrate that you have obtained consent from all participants. I first discuss face-to-face data collection and then collecting data in online asynchronous environments (e.g., SurveyMonkey). When working face to face with participants, I suggest that the researcher have a separate consent form (to be signed and dated) and another background data form, which participants do not sign. I write a unique identifier on each consent form and on the background form for that person. The identifier links a specific person's signed consent form to the rest of the data about that person. Thus, even after I have filed the paper copy of a signed consent form in a filing cabinet, I can show the link between the consent form, a background or intake form, and an interview transcript from the same study participant.

Similarly, for focus groups, I write participant identifiers on the background data forms prior to each interview. For instance, if I expect twelve people at a focus group, I would label the first set of consent forms and background data form as FG 01-01 (referring to focus group 1, participant 1). The second set would be called FG 01-02 and so on. I would place materials on the worktable before the event. When I collect forms from participants, I count them. If I had 12 consent forms but only ten background forms, I would ask for the missing forms early in the event. The number of completed background forms should equal the number of consent forms for the session. That number should equal the actual number of participants. Once again, the identifier is the link to a specific attendee's signed consent form and the rest of the data about that person. In my digital records, I log (into my Excel document) that I obtained consent from a certain number of persons on a given date, which matches the date on the signed consent forms in my possession.

Creating a Useful System

As anyone who has looked at the way that a colleague or spouse organizes photos, emails, and other documents on their own computer knows, there are multiple ways to organize files. The same is true for paper files. What makes sense to me may not make sense to you. Although it is possible to reorganize how you keep track of data partway through your study,

you will be a happier person if you can construct a useful system early in the design of your study.

What follows is one possible way to organize our data. For illustrative purposes, I am imagining a study using "mixed methods"—a combination of focus groups, individual interviews, observation, and analysis of physical artifacts pertinent to my study. I will assume that this study is limited to a single congregation. My narrative way of talking about grouping files would, of course, become directories or folders (and subdirectories or subfolders) on your computer hard drive and cloud storage. Let me say once more: it is in your interest to back up your data regularly.

This system divides study data into six categories: raw data, fieldnotes, my notes, analytic summaries, interpretations, and the final write-up. I will discuss each in turn.

1. **Raw Data**. Raw data includes information collected directly from study participants. As we have seen, these data include: consent forms, completed background/demographic information about participants, digital recordings of interviews and focus groups, artifacts produced during focus groups, and other documents pertinent to the study. In a mixed methods study of a congregation, for instance, I might have permission to look at congregational membership records or minutes of meetings.

   It is a best practice to transcribe digital recordings. Once transcribed, the researcher should destroy (delete) the digital files. Do not do this until you have verified that the transcription meets your standards and you have saved the transcription in multiple storage locations.

   Earlier in this chapter, I talked about the need for a unique identifier for each participant. Depending on the purpose of the study, that identifier might be built to include an easy way for the researcher to notice a variable of interest (e.g., 01-xxx refers to a woman and 02-xxx refers to a man). If you have participants who were members of focus groups and also were interviewed, be sure that you do not misconstrue one person who participated in two different ways as two separate people.

2. **Fieldnotes**. When observation is used to collect data (as described in chapter 7), the researcher may write extensive comments linked to a group event. Such notes might be collected in journal form and read like a diary. The researcher might also find it convenient to copy sections of fieldnotes into other documents organized, for instance, by event observed. If I observed church services, potluck meals, service activities, and leadership council meetings at my research site, I might duplicate parts of my field journal as a series of documents organized by type of event rather than by date.

3. **My Notes**. A researcher collects small notes detailing reactions, observations, and questions. These small notes may be written in a notebook or on forms. These notes may be more useful to the researcher if they are transcribed into a word processing document by date. The researcher should also write down which participant(s) the notes are about.

4. **Coded Data, Analytic Summaries, and Quotations**. As we will discuss in chapter 8, the qualitative researcher wants to find patterns (themes) in what participants say and do. By coding interview transcripts and fieldnotes, the researcher will eventually discover themes. The researcher should keep files of coded data separate from transcriptions. In my experience, I make several passes through transcripts, which generates a series of files, each building up a layer of analysis. These files may not need to be linked to individual participants, but instead are organized by themes.

Researchers frequently create concise summaries of themes including edited quotations. These work products will typically be word processing documents. Because they are digital files, they need to be backed up regularly to the cloud or external drives.

Thought Problem How might you create a naming system to manage files about five key themes discovered during data collection from 12 different people? What are your options? How will you distinguish between your first efforts at data analysis and later ones?

5. **Interpretations**. What participants say and do is recorded as data. The researcher sifts through the data for themes. The researcher also makes judgements about what participants mean or why they say or do the things that they do. These inferences are interpretations. In the interest of clarity, the researcher should keep documentation of her interpretations in separate files from coded data and summaries.
6. **The Final Report**. The researcher will write a report or reports about the study. Drafts of these documents should be kept in their own folder.

There is no single best way to organize your data management system. The key thing is usefulness: Can I find everything about a given participant, including consent forms, easily? Can I retrace my thinking that got me to definite interpretations backwards from coded data to an original set of digital audio files (interviews)? Can I find my note with the great idea that came to me at two o'clock in the morning when I couldn't sleep? If your answers to these questions are yes, you have devised a data management system that works for you.

This chapter concludes our introduction to qualitative research. Chapter 3 sketched the initial steps of a study: how to focus on a suitably sized topic, how to discover previous published research about it, and the need to decide on one of three general qualitative research approaches (phenomenological, liberationist, or project). In chapter 4, I stressed the importance of research questions. Based on her research questions, the researcher decides who to invite to participate in the study and how data will be collected. I have also discussed the need to work with gatekeepers and the need to create a system for keeping track of consent forms, data, and other work products associated with one's study. The next chapters (part 3) discuss data collection techniques in detail.

CHAPTER 4: KEY POINTS

- Qualitative research is conducted to answer stated research questions. Occasionally, qualitative research studies test hypotheses.
- The wording of research questions varies, depending on the approach used in the study.
- Qualitative research uses purposive sampling, not random sampling.
- Researchers must recruit participants with the appropriate knowledge and characteristics to answer the researcher's research questions before issuing invitations to participate.
- Researchers need to approach gatekeepers (persons with influence over potential study participants) respectfully.
- Because they seek to act ethically, researchers take care to obtain written informed consent and guard the identity of study participants throughout the study.
- Best practice is to find ways for study participants to ask the researcher questions about the study or what is expected of them regardless of whether the researcher and participants engage each other face to face or online.
- Researchers manage a great deal of textual data and confidential information about participants. It is important to create a system for data management at the first stages of a study.
- Back up digital data regularly.

PART 2 IN SUMMARY

- Chapters 3 through 4 have shown novice researchers how to design a qualitative research study. Specifically, the researcher:
  - Selects a suitable topic for research.
  - Explores what other researchers have said on the topic.
  - Writes research questions.
  - Chooses data collection techniques.
  - Follows ethical practices in recruiting study participants.
  - Manages data carefully throughout the research process.

PART 3

Data Collection Techniques

There are a variety of techniques available to qualitative researchers for collecting data that answers the research questions for a study. In Part 3, we explore:

- Interviewing Individuals
- Group Interviews, also called focus groups
- Writing unambiguous survey questions
- Counting numeric and nominal data appropriately
- Using the researcher's focused observations to collect data
- Techniques for evaluating the success of a ministry intervention as part of a qualitative research project

As you will discover, these techniques build on skills and aptitudes that ministry students already possess.

CHAPTER 5

Interviewing

Because you are the one who selects the subject matter, you should only pick areas where you know you will win. If you ask questions the right way, you do all the talking and the witness agrees that all you say is true. In a good cross-examination, you are the real witness.

– Timothy B. Walthall (2018), lawyer

The term reference interview suggests to most librarians a short face-to-face . . . interview conducted for the purpose of finding out what the user really wants to know so that the staff member can match the user's question to the library's store of information. Librarians generally agree that users' initial questions are often unclear or incomplete.

– Catherine Sheldrick Ross, Kristi Nilson, and Marie L. Radford (2009, 3), librarians

An interview is a specific kind of conversation between people. In everyday talk, we have learned a repertoire of topics that are safe for small talk with strangers (today's weather and traffic) or that are appropriate only with friends (politics, perhaps; how cute my grandchildren are, definitely). An interview is different from casual conversation because it is purposeful and there are distinct roles. In our first epigraph, a lawyer conducting the cross-examination of a witness in court is bent on winning the case. The line of questioning is developed so that the witness (who has been sworn to tell the whole truth) obediently confirms the way things are according to the clever (and winning) lawyer. In terms of power during the interview, the cross-examiner clearly has most of it. In our second epigraph, the relationship between the librarian and user (library patron) is more complicated. The user asks an initial question because the user thinks that the library has helpful information about topic X. The professional librarian wants to provide something from the library's collection that meets the real information needs of the user. The librarian assumes, based on experience, that she may need to ask clarifying questions before discovering the precise thing the patron is looking for. The library patron and the librarian have interlocking purposes. A reference interview is likely to have much more give and take than a cross-examination. In terms of power, the librarian's power abides in expertise, which ought to be used to help the patron. The patron's power lies in knowing (in far more detail than the librarian) what he needs the library to provide. As we shall see, interviewing in qualitative research has little to do with the kind of cross-examination advocated by Walthall and much more to do with the give and take exploration of a library reference interview.

This chapter addresses interviewing, one of the most powerful data collection techniques in the qualitative research arsenal. First, the general features of interviewing in qualitative research are introduced. These features are applicable to all interview contexts. Second, the focus shifts to best practices for interviewing individuals, with an emphasis on the impor-

tance of planning interview questions to collect data that answers the researcher's specific questions (RQs). Third, group interviewing, commonly known as conducting a focus group, is explained. The standard funnel approach and the dump, lump, and name (DLN) approach are described in detail. After a brief excursus about intersectionality in face-to-face interviewing, finally, the chapter concludes with a consideration of the benefits and drawbacks to the novice researcher of collecting data using only focus groups or only individual interviews.

General Features of Qualitative Research Interviewing

Before proceeding further, think about the interview situations in the exercise below. Write down your ideas before reading my comments below.

Exercise: The Range of Purposeful Interviews An interview is a purposeful conversation between people. In the examples below, think about the stated or implicit purposes of the interview. How do intersectionality and positionality come into play? These concepts were introduced in chapter 1. I have given you limited information. Use your imagination as you think through the scenarios.

- The head of the United States Customs and Border Protection agrees to an interview with a Mexican journalist.
- A recently divorced member of Yourtown Congregational Church (YCC) arranges to have an appointment with the pastor of YCC. The congregant is a woman; the pastor is a man.
- As a class assignment, a seminary student arranges an interview with the chief executive officer (CEO) of a non-profit to learn about the work that she does. When the student arrives for the interview, he discovers that the CEO is Korean American. The student is White.

In the first scenario, the interview is between people from different countries. There might be issues of communicating in a common language. The US official has a great deal of institutional power. The journalist might feel confident that she has power because of the size of her readership and the quality of her reporting. The journalist and the government official might perceive each other as adversaries. Each brings with them their personal histories of conducting interviews and being interviewed. If either party has relatives both in Mexico and the United States, those relationships would shape the background of the interview. The journalist probably has prepared a set of topics to discuss. The government official has probably researched the journalist and reviewed current news stories about his agency.

In the second scenario, the pastor might assume that the requested interview will be for pastoral care or counseling. Of course, the woman arranging the interview might want to talk about something besides her personal life or simply be inquiring about the congregation's preschool program. As an ethical practice, the pastor might hold the interview in the church office while other people are in the building. The pastor might prepare for the interview by rehearsing what he knows about the person that made the appointment. I might assume that the congregant has made the appointment on the assumption that it is her pastor's job to listen and, perhaps, offer spiritual counsel. As I write this, I am aware that I am

thinking about this scenario primarily from the point of view of the pastor. That tells you something about how my own background has shaped me.

In the third scenario, the White seminary student only finds out that the person he will interview has a different ethnicity than he does when he arrives for the interview. I would imagine that both participants in the interview would be adjusting their approach based on their past interactions with those who do not belong to their ethnic group. The student is in the position of a guest who invited himself. The student has an academic problem (his assignment) and is relying on the CEO to help him solve it by sharing what her job is like. He is also a man interviewing a woman.

In each of these scenarios, intersectionality is at work. The six imaginary persons in the examples would be, in real life, complex people shaped by their culture. Although professional roles stand in the foreground for most of these characters (government official, journalist, pastor, non-profit executive), other aspects of their identities are not switched off in an interview.

As I hope this exercise has made clear, having a purposeful conversation as a qualitative researcher has many dimensions. As a ministry student, you have already had many opportunities to have purposeful conversations. Interviewing in a qualitative research study is distinctive because of your role as a researcher and the bounded nature of your interests, as stated in your research questions.

As a qualitative researcher, you have designed a study with a tight focus as stated in your research questions. Formally, interviewing is one among several techniques you might choose to collect data. If you have written research questions that ask about the themes *voiced* by participants or how participants *describe* their experiences, then you may conduct interviews to enable you to hear what participants have to say (i.e., voice their ideas and describe their lives). In qualitative research interviewing, the researcher:

- Has a **distinct purpose**. The researcher conducts interviews to collect data pertinent to her study. In other words, the researcher sets the agenda for the discussion. Thus, a qualitative research interview works differently from a pastoral conversation in which the agenda may be set by a congregant with a problem. Unlike a reference librarian, the researcher is not trying to clarify a request for information.

- Has an **official role**. The researcher asks participants at the start of the interview to provide written consent and tells the participants that the study has been authorized by a school's institutional review board (IRB). As a representative of a school and as a researcher, she has the ethical obligation to protect participants from harm.

- Uses an **interview protocol** or script. The researcher is not "going with the flow." The researcher has a clear agenda for the conversation. The researcher also may have a similar conversation with other study participants. The researcher needs to keep to the script so that there is consistency between interviews. As we will see below, the ***interview protocol*** relates to one or more research questions. Failure to follow the interview protocol could result in a data set that lopsidedly reflects views that the researcher preferred, or that happened to be questions at the beginning of a list.

- Is **open** to unforeseen turns. If a researcher only wants a study participant to answer closed-ended questions (How old are you? Do you like broccoli?), the researcher does not need to arrange a face-to-face discussion with a study participant. She might as well send a link to an online questionnaire. A face-to-face interview offers opportunities for give and take between the researcher and the interviewee. The researcher benefits by asking clarifying questions (When you say "biblical Christianity," what

do you mean?) or asking the interviewee to provide examples. The person being interviewed benefits by having their distinctive experiences taken seriously by another person.

Interviewing Individuals

Preliminary Concerns

In qualitative research, there are a range of options for interviewing individuals. The way that a researcher shapes an interview depends on the answers to several questions. These include:

- What is my relationship to my interviewees?
- How many interviews am I able to conduct with the same person?
- How established are my ideas about what I want my interviewee to talk about?
- What level of complexity and detail do I want to discover?

In many cases, the researcher does not have an established relationship to the persons being interviewed. The quality of such interviews will depend, to a large degree, on the researcher's ability to display interest in the interviewee and quickly establish rapport. One's first impression matters. Sometimes researchers have a history with persons whom they interview, such as DMin students interviewing congregants. It is important for the novice researcher to remember that, during a research interview, the person conducting the study has taken on the role of "invited outsider."

A researcher who is able to conduct only one interview with a person must figure out the most important things to talk about, since she will not have the opportunity to ponder what was said in the first interview and ask for clarifications in a second or third interview. If I am confident about what I want the interviewee to talk about, my questions will have a tighter structure; if I am less sure, I will ask more open-ended, less structured questions. "The unstructured interview is the mode of choice when the interviewer *does not know what he or she doesn't know* and must therefore rely on the interviewee to tell him or her" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 269, italics in original). If the researcher wants to explore the complexity of one individual's experience or knowledge, the researcher may choose to use repeated interviews. For example, Irving Seidman developed a technique for in-depth phenomenological interviewing based on a series of three interviews with a given participant (Seidman 2013). To think about the competing factors in play when deciding about what to ask in interviews, complete the exercise below.

Exercise: What to Ask You want to study what it is like for ministers in your denomination to be preachers. Based on previous research and your own experience, you know that preaching involves working with a biblical text or texts, understanding the circumstance of those who will hear the sermon, and somehow putting the two

together. A dozen ministers have agreed to take part in your study. You know only a few of them well.

- What are your research questions (RQs)?
- If you could only interview each person once, what would you ask them?
- If you were able to conduct two or more interviews, what would you ask in the first interview? Why? What would you ask in subsequent interviews?
- Would you interview all twelve volunteers? Why or why not?

Regarding research questions (RQs), the researcher might write them like this:

General RQ. What is it like being a preacher for ministers belonging to [my denomination]?

RQ 1. How do ministers describe their engagement with biblical texts for preaching?

RQ 2. How do ministers relate their knowledge of congregants and their community to their preaching?

The researcher might also add a third research question:

RQ 3. What other dimensions of being a preacher do ministers articulate?

These research questions are written in the phenomenological approach. If the researcher were able to interview each study participant only once, she might ask a question or two about each of these research questions during an interview. I will say more about the questioning schedule, or interview protocol below. If the researcher could conduct two interviews, she might ask questions that answer RQ 1 and RQ 2 during the first interview. In the second interview, she could ask follow-up questions based on responses from the first interview. Then the researcher could ask the third question, phrased along the lines as "What else is important to you about preaching that we haven't discussed?"

Should the researcher interview a dozen ministers for her study? As in Jesus's parable about building a tower (Lk 14:28), she should count the cost. As noted in chapter 4, the time commitment for conducting and transcribing an hour-long interview is five or more hours. Without the money to outsource interview transcription, interviewing a dozen ministers once requires the commitment of 60 hours for that work. Interviewing six participants twice, at one hour each, also adds up to 60 hours. After conducting the interviews and transcribing them, of course, the researcher then needs to spend time analyzing them (as described in chapter 8) and interpreting them (fun ahead in chapter 9). The researcher should consider the deadline for completing the project and other commitments when deciding how many participants to interview. In this case, the researcher might discover richer data by interviewing four or five ministers multiple times than by interviewing twelve only once.

Thought Problem How does the researcher's design about the number of participants to interview or the number of times to interview them affect the robustness of her study? Why? (If you are stumped, review chapter 4.)

Planning Interviews

Although a good qualitative research interview often feels to interviewees like a "normal" conversation, a qualitative research interview achieves that impression because of careful planning. Think of it this way. A qualitative research interview is like a church service. There is a customary order of activities known to regular worshippers. When done well, there is a flow to the service that is spiritually satisfying and pleasing to God. Before the service took place, no doubt, a team of worship leaders worked hard to make many decisions about what would happen in worship that are invisible to worshipers. In some traditions, the preacher chose scripture texts for a sermon. Even in traditions that follow a centuries-old liturgical pattern, someone chose which hymns to sing and made sure that musicians rehearsed. Bulletins were printed (or PowerPoint slides were created for projecting on screens) and ushers arrived before the service to greet congregants. Like a rock concert that appears utterly spontaneous, a church service and a qualitative research interview appear effortless because of careful planning.

A qualitative research interview takes place in a definite physical or virtual setting. Researchers need to choose settings that provide the interviewee protection from prying ears and eyes, minimize distractions, and are workable to both the interviewee and the researcher. Interviews should take place in locations where the interviewee feels safe. When possible, interviews should be done in spaces that allow the interviewer and interviewee to be by themselves. Such spaces might include a church office or an empty classroom. A good interview space is free from visual and acoustic distractions. Traditionally, many qualitative research interviews happen in public spaces like coffee shops, restaurants, and airport lounges. Ambient noise can be a challenge in these settings. Finding a quiet space will help the participants to understand each other and will improve the quality of a sound recording made for later transcription. As a wearer of hearing aids, my preference for physical settings is a room with a door that can be closed to minimize background sounds. In some cases the researcher might need to prepare for the interview to be mediated by a third person. For instance, if the researcher wanted to interview a deaf person, the interview might include the researcher, the participant, and someone interpreting to and from American Sign Language. If the interviewer were to interview a person who had difficulty in expressing him- or herself verbally, the interview might also include a caregiver who helps the interviewer understand what the participant means. For further discussion about the range of accommodations needed to include persons with disabilities in mixed methods research, see Kroll (2011).

To think more about issues to consider when planning where to hold an interview, please complete the exercise below. Bring to bear what you have learned so far about qualitative research and your personal experiences of structured conversations. If you are completing this exercise with classmates, discuss your answers with a peer before reading my comments.

> **Exercise: Setting the Stage** Below are four possible spaces for you to conduct an interview for your qualitative research study. What will you need to bring with you

to the interview (besides consent forms)? What are the benefits and drawbacks of each setting?

- You will hold the interview in the cafeteria of the office where your interviewee works.
- You and the interviewee will meet in an empty Sunday school classroom at her church on a Tuesday afternoon. You have permission to use this space.
- You will hold the interview at your interviewee's favorite coffee shop.
- You will hold the interview virtually via Zoom or Skype.

For each of these spaces, the interviewee needs to bring along consent forms, a recording device, and whatever the researcher uses to take notes. When I use a recording device, I typically bring two of them and extra batteries. Be prepared. The researcher may also have other handouts, such as a list of questions. The researcher may also need a timer or a watch to keep track of time. Novice interviewers will discover that time can pass very quickly. Because the researcher has an agenda (specifically, asking all questions in the interview protocol), the researcher needs to monitor and manage time. If the interview happens online, the researcher needs to provide consent forms and other handouts electronically. Some conferencing software allows for recording to start simply by clicking a mouse.

Some of these locations mentioned in the exercise benefit the interviewee. For instance, it is convenient for the interviewee not to have to leave work to be interviewed (first scenario). Holding the interview in a place of the interviewee's choosing (third scenario) or online would help the interviewee feel comfortable in a safe space. The Sunday school room (second scenario) may also feel comfortable to the interviewee because it is a familiar place. As a researcher, I am always concerned about privacy, especially noise. A cafeteria (first scenario) or coffee shop (third scenario) might be difficult places to hold a private conversation. The relative privacy of a Sunday school classroom or computer screen meet the privacy standard well.

Disadvantages of conducting the interview online include having a slow Internet connection and a decreased ability to see the body language and facial responses of the interviewee. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual spaces were used for interviewing. Health care providers, for instance, have conversations with patients who live in isolated areas using videoconferencing software (Perdew, Erickson, and Litke 2017; National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion 2020). Ministers conduct virtual office hours. A key benefit of interviewing in the online environment is flexibility. "Skype encourages persons who have time and place limitations for face-to-face interviews to participate in research" (Janghorban, Roudsari, and Taghipour 2014, 1). An additional benefit of conducting an interview online is that software may enable recording of both images and sound. The researcher would then be able to grasp nuance about meaning by reviewing the way that participants spoke (e.g., did the interviewee wink when she said that she "just loved" middle school students?) as well as the words that they spoke.

Individual Interviews: The Six Steps

A qualitative research interview has six steps. The list below shows them in order.

What Happens During a Qualitative Research Interview?

1. **Preliminaries**. The researcher has all materials in hand (consent forms, recorder, handouts) and arrives early to the interviewing location.
2. **Introduction**. The researcher welcomes the interviewee and establishes rapport through small talk. The researcher provides a brief overview of the study (the calling card).
3. **Obtaining Consent and Background Information**. The researcher gives the interviewee two copies of the consent form. The interviewee is given time to read the form and ask questions before signing. The researcher gives the participant time to provide background information by using a questionnaire. Background information includes such characteristics as gender, church affiliation, age, which could help the researcher interpret the meanings of findings.
4. **Questions and Answers**. The researcher turns on the recording device, if used. The researcher asks a series of questions following a standard interview protocol.
5. **Thanks**. As the interview concludes, the researcher thanks the interviewee and reinforces the value of the participant's contribution to the study.
6. **Follow-up**. The researcher makes notes as soon as it is convenient. The researcher backs up recorded data and safely stores consent forms and background information forms. The researcher sends a thank-you email. The researcher records background data from paper forms in a database or spreadsheet.

The first stage of the interview is the preliminaries. The researcher should arrive early at the location with everything needed for the interview. It is a good idea to test recording equipment. Remember: you asked the interviewee to give up some of their time to talk to you. Be prepared.

The second stage of the interview is the introduction. The interview might be the first or second time that the researcher has met the interviewee. It is appropriate to spend some time chatting. This breaks the social ice. People being people, we feel more connected to a relative stranger if we discover that we both went to Concordia College, have granddaughters named Alice, or cheer for the same football team. By the same token, the researcher should steer away from controversial topics at the start of interviews. During the time I was writing this book, topics to avoid in the United States included wearing face masks and how to reform (or not) police departments. In many contexts, discussions of politics are best avoided. Small talk at the start of interview sessions is not a waste of time. The researcher uses polite small talk to build a foundation for the rest of the interview.

In my experience, it is common for participants at the start of interviews to ask for more details about what they are being asked to do or the purpose of the study. Sometimes, this is phrased as: "So why do you really want to interview me?" Given the use of deception in psychological research (Krasnow, Howard, and Eisenbruch 2020) and the desire of some interviewees to please an authority figure (remember: as a researcher you may be perceived as an expert and given deference), the question is sensible. The researcher should have a succinct, practiced response to this question. I call this the study's *calling card*. The calling card should contain accurate information about the study but not be a defense or summary. The calling card should be consistent with the language that you used in messages to recruit study participants. It might contain some of the phrases in the consent form. It is not neces-

sary to use technical language like research questions, phenomenological approach, or coding. (We will get to coding in chapter 8.) Another way to think about the calling card is that it is the "elevator pitch" about your study—short enough to state in a few words, but meaty enough to be interesting.

At some point, the researcher makes the conversation more formal by obtaining written consent from the interviewee. The researcher should give the interviewee the written consent form (two copies) and give time for the interviewee to read it. When it seems that the interviewee has read the whole document, the researcher should ask if the interviewee has any questions. The researcher should also reinforce verbally that consent is voluntary and may be withdrawn during the interview, should the participant feel uncomfortable. During discussion of the consent form, the researcher should ask permission to record the interview, unless it was agreed in advance not to. It is a good practice for the interviewee to sign two copies of the consent form. The interviewee keeps one; the researcher the other. I encourage researchers at this point in the interview to have the participant complete a background questionnaire. It saves time to have an interviewee check some boxes or write down a few words about biographical details that do not require clarification, but which can be helpful in making sense of the interview later. I will say more about how to do this in chapter 6.

The formality of the interview increases when the researcher turns on the recording device. The researcher should turn the recorder on early enough to capture everything in your interviewing protocol. I generally make a big deal about turning on the recorder, sitting up straight, and speaking into the machine: "Today is February 1st and I am conducting interview number four for the study. . ." If I have handouts, I first turn on the recorder and then distribute them. I want to capture any questions that the interviewee has about them on the recording.

The heart of the interview—step three—is asking questions and hearing answers. A qualitative research interview is governed by an interview protocol. This document sets down in writing the questions that the interviewee will answer. Putting the questions down in writing serves three key purposes. First, it signals to the interviewee where this journey is going (and when it will end). Second, it disciplines the researcher. She should ask each core question in the same way to all participants in the study. She should have the same conversational tone for each question, not hinting that some questions are less interesting than others. Third, having the questions written down helps the researcher keep track of the interview. Given human frailty and wondering minds, the researcher needs road signs to keep from getting lost.

The questions on the interview protocol bear a logical relationship to one or more research questions of the study. For instance, Christian Scharen and Eileen Campbell-Reed (2016) are conducting a long-term study of the shifts made by seminary students as they become seasoned pastors. In their first round of interviews, they asked participants three open-ended questions "What brought you to this point in your life? What has prepared you for ministry? And tell about an 'aha learning moment' in ministry" (60). These questions are derived from the overarching research question of their study: "How is pastoral imagination formed through practice in ministry over time?" (2). In this case, the questions the researchers ask do not use the phrase "pastoral imagination" or the equally technical term "practice in ministry." Nevertheless, the responses to the questions in the interview protocol provide the raw material (data) that the researchers analyze to address the focus of their project.

In my own research, I have generally used more specific questions in interview protocols. For now, look at the interview protocol in the list below. It is based on research I conducted (Lincoln 2020). The protocol serves one of the research questions for the study: What themes do participants use to describe being a minister serving a congregation? These themes were

voiced by Episcopal clergy; I have therefore used the term priest below. Each theme is named (in bold below) and given a working definition.

Being a Priest Serving a Congregation: Interview Protocol

- **Word & Sacrament**. How priests teach and preach the Gospel, preside in worship, and administer the Church's sacraments. (This theme includes teaching, sermon preparation, and worship planning.)
- **Leading**. The ways that priests discover a *vision* for God's work in their communities and *motivate* members to strive towards it.
- **Administration**. The ways that priests organize and manage a congregation's activities and finances.
- **Caring**. The ways that priests counsel members and are present with them in life circumstances. This theme focuses on the priest as a provider of pastoral care.
- **Relationships**. How priests connect and work with members in congregational life.
- **Witnessing God's Action**. The big and small ways that priests observe God at work in congregational life.
- **Pastoral Maturity**. The ways that priests, over time, change because of experiences in ministry.
- **Well-being**. The welfare of priests as persons, including their inner lives, sense of calling, and non-ministerial roles. This theme includes the priest's spiritual life, health, and balancing family life and ministry.

In this interviewing approach, I gave my interviewee a copy of the protocol and began my formal questioning by providing the same information to each person interviewed. In this case, it sounded like this:

> In an earlier part of my study, a focus group of Episcopal priests identified the eight themes on this page. The page gives the name and definition of each theme. I am going to ask you to tell me about your experience of each theme. You are the expert in this conversation; I am interested in learning about your experience. Based on your answers, I may ask the questions out of order so that our conversation has a good flow to it. Don't worry about that. I will keep track. To begin, tell me about Word and Sacrament, defined as "How priests teach and preach the Gospel, preside in worship, and administer the Church's sacraments."

I know from experience that I can have a 45- to 60-minute conversation with a participant using this template, even without asking many follow-up questions to clarify meaning. Notice that the definition for the theme "Leading" includes two parts. To remind me that I want interviewees to speak to both parts, I have used italics for the words *vision* and *motivate*. If a participant only talked about having a vision, I would ask a follow-up question along the lines of, "Can you also tell me about your experience of motivating members of your congregation to work towards a common vision?"

In this interview protocol, the specific order of the questions does not matter. It is important, however, for the researcher to ask about each theme. This interview protocol might be improved with the addition of a final question: What else would you like to say about being

a priest who serves a congregation? As the interview concludes, it is a good practice for the interviewer to give the study participant an opportunity to talk about something else that she thinks is pertinent to the theme. Sometimes this final question elicits a story. Sometimes the interviewee might change her mind and revise a previous answer. When this happens during an interview of yours, rejoice. It is a sign that the interviewee is thoroughly engaged in the interview.

In many research interviews, the order of questions matters. Some questions provide background and may be relatively unthreatening. These should be asked at the start of the conversation. As the interview progresses and the interviewee overcomes any initial nervousness, the researcher can ask more complicated or more prying questions. Practice thinking about a sequence of interview questions by completing the exercise below. The exercise is informed by Scharen and Campbell-Reed's concern for how a minister's "pastoral imagination" changes over time and the theme of pastoral maturity identified by Episcopal priests in my study. Write down your ideas before reading my comments.

Exercise: Questions to Get at Changed Understandings You are conducting a study about how professional church workers grow in their capacities during the first five years of their professional careers. You are able to interview eight ministers who have finished five to six years of full-time ministry. Your research questions are:

- RQ 1: As they completed seminary, what did study participants think that their service as ministers would be?
- RQ 2: How do study participants understand themselves as ministers now?
- RQ 3: What critical moments of learning in ministry do participants recall?

What questions will you put in your interview protocol? Why? If you had the choice of conducting one 90-minute interview or two 50-minute interviews within a few days of each other, which would you choose?

In thinking through this exercise, I would decide about conducting one or two interviews first. Conducting two interviews makes more demands on the researcher's time and the interviewee. However, if the interviews are spaced out, both the researcher and the interviewee would have time to think about how the first interview went before the second takes place. Time for reflection might contribute to a richer second interview. Below are interview protocols, one assuming a single interview and another assuming two interviews. How do they compare with your ideas?

One-interview Scenario: Changed Understandings of Ministry

I am studying how ministers grow and change during their first years in ministry. My interview questions are:

1) Where did you attend seminary? What did your seminary professors tell you that ministry would be like?

2) As you approached graduation, what did you think it would be like in ministry?

3) Tell me about your first year as a minister.

4) What do you do best as a minister now? What did you do best when you were just starting out?

5) Tell me about times when you took initiative (e.g., starting a new program). How was your initiative received?

6) How do you balance time required to serve your congregants with time that you need to be with your family or just "off the clock"? How has this changed over time?

7) Who has helped you to grow the most during your ministry?

8) How have your relationships with congregants changed over time?

9) Tell me about your life as a minister in the past year. What are the biggest changes from when you were fresh out of seminary?

10) Are there one or two incidents in your ministry that stand out? Why are they important to you?

11) What else would you like to tell me on our topic?

Two-interview Scenario: Changed Understandings of Ministry

First Interview

1) Where did you attend seminary? What did your seminary professors tell you that ministry would be like?

2) As you approached graduation, what did you think it would be like in ministry?

3) Tell me about your first year as a minister.

4) What did you do best when you were just starting out?

5) Tell me about times when you took initiative (e.g., starting a new program). How was your initiative received?

6) How do you balance time required to serve your congregants with time that you need to be with your family or just "off the clock"? How has this changed over time?

7) Is there anything else you would like to say before the interview ends?

Second Interview

1) Who has helped you to grow the most during your ministry?

2) How have your relationships with congregants changed over time?

3) In the first interview, you told me that as a rookie minister you were best at X. What do you do best as a minister now?

4) In the first interview, you mentioned X. I'm not sure that I got the point that you were making. Could you say more about X?

5) Tell me about your life as a minister in the past year. What are the biggest changes from when you were fresh out of seminary?

6) Are there one or two incidents in your ministry that stand out? Why are they important to you?

7) Is there anything else you would like to say before the interview ends?

There are many good ways to phrase questions related to the research questions of this study. If the researcher is gathering all his data via interviews, then he must ask questions that relate logically to all his research questions. Notice that my questions did not follow a strict chronological order, although I began by asking about understandings of ministry in the past. A researcher might choose to ask questions about the present circumstances of a pastor, and then (like Homer in the Odyssey) invoke memory as flashbacks. The substance of some questions (e.g., the questions about work-life balance) comes from what the researcher knows from experience and because of reading during the preparatory phases of the study. Doing a good literature review will make you look smart in the write-up of your study and, more importantly, will make you a more knowledgeable questioner.

Two of my questions in the two-interview format pointed back to the first interview. An advantage of conducting two interviews is that the researcher can replay the recording of the first interview and consult notes. There is a tendency for novice interviewers raised in North America to be polite and give non-verbal feedback to interviewers indicating "I get it," even when the interviewer does not understand what she is being told. In a two-interview format, the researcher gets an opportunity to ask for clarifications about things that are not clear to the researcher. I find that a phrase like "please tell me more about topic X" gives interviewees space to expand on their previous comments without hinting to the interviewee that some responses are more desirable than others. In both interview protocols, I have placed the question about critical moments of learning (related to RQ 3)at the end. I have done so because this question invites the interviewee to be vulnerable. Few of us like to recall a time when we made mistakes and became a sadder but wiser person. Sequencing questions so that the more difficult questions come towards the end of the interview enables the researcher to establish a relationship with the interviewee that forms a sound foundation for self-revelation by the interviewee. (More about that below). If the researcher appears to be a good listener, the interviewee is more likely to give detailed, generative answers.

Thought Problem Should the researcher in this example (changed understandings of ministry) give the list of questions to the interviewee? How do these questions differ from the earlier example (being a priest in a congregation)?

To summarize this section: asking questions and listening attentively to the interviewee's answers form the heart of a research interview. The researcher engages in these tasks while monitoring time to ensure that all necessary questions are asked and answered.

In the fifth stage, the researcher thanks the interviewee. I generally explain again how the participant's words fit into the overall study. One of the rewards that is given to interviewees is the experience of being taken seriously. Another is the knowledge that the research will use their experiences to gain insight about something that the participant cares about. Sometimes a researcher will offer to send study participants a summary of findings. This offering can be an incentive for participants. If the researcher has made this offer, she should make sure as the interview concludes that she has the information from the interviewee that she needs to send a summary. It is good practice to notice if the interviewee has

taken her copy of the signed consent form or left it behind. If the form is left behind, I invite the interviewee to take it for her records.

The last stage of the interview is follow-up. During an interview, a researcher has gained many impressions about the interviewee that do not show up as sounds on an audio recording. These impressions are likely to fade away soon after the interview. It is a good practice to write or record notes about the interview soon after the interview ends. These notes might be about the interviewee ("Participant seven is the only Methodist interviewed," "This person seemed all dressed up compared to other interviewees, what's that about?") or reflect the interviewer's own mental crunching of new data. Qualitative researchers cannot help but think about the data in hand so far, comparing the newest data with the old. Did this person express any unique opinions? Did this person use insider language? Does something this person said trigger a memory of another interview? What patterns are emerging in the data because of this interview? In chapter 8, we will discuss analyzing data in formal detail. My point is that there is value to your observations and tentative interpretations. They are helpful parts of the constant comparative method. Write them down or record them after each interview. Doing so aids your understanding of the data and interpretation of meanings.

As part of the follow-up to each interview, the researcher should back up recorded interview data for transcribing and enter answers to background questions into the spreadsheet or database. Finally, she should send a thank-you email to the person interviewed.

> **Thought Problem** Which steps of the individual interview process are most like everyday conversation? Which step is the most unlike it? Which steps seem the most difficult to do well?

Interviewing Realities

The course of individual interviews in qualitative research, like true love, never did run smooth. Novice researchers should be prepared for common problems. Here I discuss four of them: the awkwardness of the first part of interviews, managing time and note taking during the conversation, clarifying the meaning of what participants say, and research attentiveness during interviews.

The Awkward First Few Minutes

Do not be surprised if the interviewee is nervous and has difficulty with the first couple of formal questions that you ask, especially if you are asking open-ended questions. Below are two excerpts from the start of interviews that I conducted. I have italicized text to reinforce my point that interviewees need to get their bearings during the early stage of the interview.

From an Interview at a Methodist Seminary

Interviewer: Okay. We are beginning our second interview this morning. We'll just lead it off with a theme of preaching; how pastors plan and deliver sermons. So tell me about pastors and preaching.

Interviewee: I think preaching is often what the congregation knows most about the work of the pastoral office, and sometimes they'll even call the pastor "the preacher,"

because it's so closely identified in the US Christianity, but especially in particular traditions where they think that's very important. *What else would you like to know about what I think about preaching?*

A lot of times it's too narrow of a definition. Many pastors are solely evaluated based on their preaching. Other gifts and graces receive lesser status.

Interviewer: *This is very open-ended, so however much you wanna say is fine. . .*

From an Interview at an Episcopal Seminary

Interviewer: Your colleagues came up with the theme of liturgy—how priests plan and participate in the congregation's worship of God. So tell me about priests and liturgy.

Interviewee: Hmm. So, canonically, the priest is responsible for the spiritual life for the congregation. So that means liturgy is a huge part of the spirituality of Episcopalians. The priest has a relationship to the liturgy itself, which links it to the tradition. But it also is linked to the life of the congregation.

So the relationship to the liturgy is more than making sure it happens and having oversight on how it happens—the style—but also what it means in the life of the community. In other words, how does the community understand what's going on. Eucharist is our principal Sunday worship. So that's sacramental.

So the priest has a relationship with that. So it's more than the practical stuff. And there are a lot of other ministries that are involved in making Eucharist on Sunday. *So, is that what you're looking for?*

Interviewer: That's great. *I'm looking for what you want to tell me for things that you think matter* about ---

Interviewee: What it's like to be a priest in the community.

Interviewer: Yeah.

In both excerpts, I had engaged in some casual conversation and obtained informed consent before I turned on the recorder and began to ask questions. I had also given both interviewees the list of themes, which functioned as the questions in my interview protocol. Nevertheless, in answering the first question (which is intentionally open-ended), both interviewees wanted some feedback to know that they were on track: "So is that what you're looking for?" This concern about giving helpful information can be overcome somewhat by asking more specific questions during the first part of an interview. For example, "How long have you been the pastor of the Second Reformed Church?" is a simpler question to answer than "How would you describe the way that church leaders make decisions about worship services?"

Managing the Time and Note Taking

During the interview, it is the researcher's job to direct the conversation so that the interviewee answers all the questions on the interview protocol. The researcher must therefore keep track of time. Sometimes a question or two sparks a very long response from the interviewee, and the researcher feels the pinch of time. It is appropriate to say things like "We have already used 30 minutes of our hour. I'd like to move on to another topic." Or: "We have already used 45 minutes of our hour. Do you have time to extend our conversation for another half-hour?" Remember, the researcher has asked for the interview and is responsible for managing time in a way that best collects the data that she needs.

Part of the reason why using a recording device is helpful in interviewing is that it frees the researcher from taking real-time notes. In my experience, the tasks of asking questions and deeply listening to the interviewee take up all my powers of concentration. I sometimes mention to participants that I will take a few notes to jog my memory and aid my thinking. If the researcher has established rapport with the interviewee, taking notes can then be done without interrupting the flow of the conversation. Sometimes my notes are little phrases like: "Great quote about question 4"; "Body language shifted when I asked question 6." Sometimes they express my confusion: "Answer at minute 28 contradicts early statements?" "What does BIBLICAL mean?" Some researchers make detailed notes about the appearance of an interviewee soon after the interview. This is helpful if the researcher intends to paint a portrait of individual respondents for a presentation or report.

Clarifying Meanings

If the researcher has done her interview preparation well, she knows the main questions to ask in advance and writes them down on the script or interview protocol. But the researcher conducts interviews precisely because she does not know what participants might say. Sometimes responses make little sense to the interviewer. To think more deeply about listening and asking follow-up questions, complete the exercise below. There is more than one appropriate answer.

EXERCISE: WHAT DID YOU SAY? WHAT DID YOU MEAN? What might an interviewer do in the following cases? Why?

- An interviewee uses the phrase "spiritual warfare" several times. Towards the end of the interview, the researcher realizes that he does not understand what the interviewee means by the phrase.
- An interviewee makes factually incorrect statements about the theological tradition of the interviewer. The interviewer feels her heart racing.
- The story told by an interviewee reminds the interviewer of something similar (and very funny) that happened to him.
- An interviewee has told the same story three times during the interview and is about to tell it again. From the researcher's point of view, the story is not pertinent to any question in the interview protocol.
- An interviewee breaks into tears while answering a question.

In the first instance, it seems that the interviewer was hoping that an unfamiliar term might become clearer as the interview wore on. It is appropriate for the interviewer to ask

for clarification. She might say: “You have used the phrase ‘spiritual warfare’ several times in our interview. Could you say a little more about that? It’s not a term that I am familiar with.” The researcher might also try to find out more about this phrase using library resources afterwards. It is preferable, however, to ask the interviewee. For instance, during a research interview that I conducted, a participant referred to “the five acts of worship” in his tradition. I was unfamiliar with the term and simply asked: “What are the five acts? Can you list them for me?”

In the second instance, the researcher (rightly) assumes that she understands her own theological tradition and is aware that, despite her efforts to put aside her own concerns during the interview, she is feeling stress. Is it appropriate to correct the interviewee? Doing so might make the researcher feel better but might push the interview away from its stated purpose of hearing from the interviewee. Instead, the researcher might say something like: “I am curious about how you learned that denomination X believes Y. Could you tell me about that?” An interviewer might simply take a deep breath or two to settle her nerves and then continue with questions from the protocol. In my experience, it is not uncommon for interviewees to make statements about traditions other than their own which are inaccurate. The researcher will have the opportunity during interpretation of study findings to note such inaccuracies, should they be pertinent.

In the third instance, swapping stories with someone is a perfectly normal (and fun) part of everyday conversation. But a research interview is not a casual conversation. It is a better use of time to hear more from the interviewee than for the interviewer to have the chance to deliver a punchline. It is important for novice researchers to remember that the interview is not about the researcher. The purpose of interviews is to collect data from study participants. They are the experts in the room.

The fourth instance (excessive repetition) is a constant challenge for interviewers. Human beings often interrupt one thought with another in oral communication. I do it all the time. Telling the same story repeatedly is not the exclusive province of professors and preachers. In cases where the interviewee has related the same anecdote more than once, it is appropriate to say something like: “You know, I think you told this story already. I have it safely recorded. Is there something else that you want to say about topic X?” Another approach might be: “You’ve told this story two or three times. Why is it so significant to you?” Both tactics are efforts to honor the person’s story while using precious interview time to the researcher’s best advantage. Remember, the people that you interview are thinking and responding to you, the interviewer. They are not actors voicing lines that they have memorized.

The last scenario in the exercise (tears) reminds us that interviews may evoke strong emotions. People cry for a variety of reasons. The meaning of crying depends on the context. In a study about loss and grieving, a researcher might be prepared for an interviewee to cry. How should the interviewer respond? The interviewer might simply sit in silence for a few moments. The researcher might also ask “Do you need a moment? I am happy to stop recording.” Sometimes tears are the paradoxical tears of joy and the interview might continue without interruption or emotional distress. The relationship between a researcher and an interviewee is not a pastoral or clinical one. The novice researcher might be tempted to respond the way that she would as a pastor or chaplain. I would caution against mixing the role of researcher with any other role. If an interviewee appears distraught, it is appropriate for the researcher to suggest ending the interview. Or the interviewee might want to stop the interview.

One chapter of Irving Seidman’s book on interviewing has the splendid title “Technique Isn’t Everything, But It Is a Lot” (Seidman 2013, 81–95). Novice interviewers may wonder if they are cut out for interviewing, as if good interviewers have different genes from the rest of us. In fact, good interviewers have mastered a set of techniques, which they have learned

how to do by practicing them. We have already discussed writing and sequencing questions and how to handle some commonly encountered bumps in the road. Another interviewing skill focuses on achieving greater clarity about what interviewees mean by opaque phrases. Social scientists often call these probing questions or exploratory questions. These questions are distinctive in that "they cannot be anticipated or written ahead of time" (Guest, Maney, and Mitchell 2013, 148) because they arise during the flow of the interview. In other words, they are not part of the researcher's interview protocol. We have already discussed the example of asking for the definition of a term or phrase that is unclear to the researcher. Greater insight is also achieved by asking exploratory or probing questions. Six good ones are:

- Can you give me an example of that? (One of my favorite probing questions.)
- How does what you told me just now relate to X? [x= something said earlier in the interview]
- Is that that how it usually works for you?
- You have talked about [unclear phrase]. I'm not familiar with this term. Please give me a definition.
- Can you recall an event about X that really stands out?
- How did X make you feel?

The researcher makes decisions about asking clarifying questions in the moment. The novice researcher should recall that asking for clarification is not rudeness. After all, a research interview happens at the behest of the interviewer; she sets the agenda. Asking probing questions indicates to the interviewee that the researcher is interested in the interviewee's experiences and ideas.

In my experience, some interviews go smoothly, but not all of them. Certain interviews feel like a series of verbal hiccups rather than a conversation. Sometimes, despite my best efforts to focus the interview on its stated purposes, the interviewee only wants to talk about certain aspects of his or her experience. In my dissertation research, for instance, one study participant kept returning to a single topic: the right way for seminary professors to plan and teach classes. While this topic was one of several that I wanted to cover in the interview, this interviewee talked about "the right way to teach" in virtually every answer. Eventually, I ended the interview without getting to all the questions that I had planned. Nevertheless, the novice researcher should take heart. Even when an interview feels like pulling teeth in the moment, the researcher will re-visit the interview as she analyzes the transcript. Even difficult interviews can produce useful data.

Presence and Self-Disclosure

In chapter 2, I noted that Christians honor persons as individuals who bear the image of God. Anyone engaging in qualitative research is ethically obligated to values such as justice and beneficence. In the context of research interviews, the researcher displays respect for another by taking the interview relationship seriously. An interview with another person is a social experience; it is not analogous to the relationship that I have with the star that I view with a telescope or a colony of mold in my petri dish. Alfred Schutz argues that our social worlds create a We-relationship. "In principle, it is only the face-to-face situation in which I can address a question to you. . . . I can ask you how you are interpreting your lived experience, and, in the process, I can correct, expand, and enrich my own understanding of you"

(Schutz 1967/1932, 171). Philosophers in the phenomenological school of Husserl and Schutz argue that we engage in countless We-relationships. My point here is that a research interview is a specific kind of We-relationship which deserves genuine interpersonal engagement. Researchers have an ethical obligation to treat study participants as fully human. The practical advice in this chapter about how to be a good interviewer is not simple politeness (showing that you understand cultural norms) nor professional etiquette (the physician's "bedside manner"). More importantly, good interview practice takes those interviewed seriously as persons who have chosen to share something of their lives with the researcher. Thus, during an interview, the researcher needs to "show up" emotionally. As Pretto notes, if researchers interview people who are hearing-impaired, "non-verbal communication is key." Competent researchers maintain eye contact and "express their interest and attention through their facial expressions and body language, and not verbally" (Pretto, 2017, 59). Analogously, a sighted researcher interviewing a blind person would need to verbalize feelings and supportive cues rather than to convey them, for instance, with a sympathetic look or a nod of the head.

When I engage in an interview with a study participant, I expect that, by the interview's end, I will know a lot more about the participant than the participant will know about me. Being present and professional, however, does not mean to completely refrain from self-disclosure. More than halfway into an hour-long interview that I conducted using six open-ended questions, this exchange took place.

Interviewee: Yes, yes. [Pastoral work is always] three-fold. I think so.

Interviewer: Thank you. Well, we have worked through the six themes. Does anything occur to you about the six themes that you want to go back and say more about at this point? I'm having fun. I hope you are, just want to say.

Interviewee: Yeah, it's great for me. I'd like to get a copy of the text of my interview, if that's possible.

While it does not always feel like fun to conduct interviews, brief comments like "I'm having fun" signal that the researcher is engaged in a discussion with another person, not going through the motions while relying on the recording device to capture "the data" for later analysis.

> **Thought Problem: Presence and Self-Disclosure** How is the We-relationship that happens during a research interview like the We-relationships that a ministry student or minister has with members of a congregation? How is it different from those relationships? What accounts for the difference?

To conclude this section about interviewing individuals, here are six practical tips to become a good interviewer and six practices to avoid.

Good Interviewing Practice

- **Be prepared**. Good interviewers move smoothly through the interview because of advanced preparation of the setting and the interview protocol.
- **Display interest**. Good interviewers look like they are paying attention to the interviewee.

- **Ask all questions**. Good interviewers ask all questions on the interview protocol of all interviewees.
- **Honor time limits**. Good interviewers respect the time commitments of interviewees by starting and ending on time.
- **Admit confusion**. Good interviewers admit when something is not clear to them and ask the interviewee for further explanation.
- **The 90/10 rule**. Good interviewers listen 90 percent of the time and talk 10 percent of the time.

Poor Interviewing Practice

- **Displaying lack of interest**. Poor interviewers appear bored or distracted. They look at the clock, not the interviewee.
- **Losing track of time**. Poor interviewers do not manage time well. As a result, they may not ask all their questions or may ask the interviewee for more time than was agreed to in advance.
- **Talking too much**. Poor interviewers reduce the volume of data that they collect because they consistently take up airtime.
- **Interrupting and anticipating responses**. Poor interviewers do not let interviewees fully express themselves.
- **Arguing**. Poor interviewers contradict statements made by interviewees.
- **Giving advice**. Poor interviewees misconstrue the role of researcher by making suggestions or "trying to help" interviewees. A research interview is not a counseling session or the exercise of pastoral care.

Thought Problem What aspects of good and bad interview practice are most challenging for you? What would you add to either list? Why?

Thought Problems from the Databank The databank at the end of this book contains several full-length interviews. Read one or two to get a sense of the difference between how characters in novels talk and how real people do. Remember, you will be interviewing real people.

Based on the suggestions for practice in this section, critique how the interviewer in the databank interviews conducted himself.

Interviewing Groups, also known as Focus Groups

Introducing Focus Groups

Interviewing a group of people at the same time has some aspects in common with an interview done one on one. Both kinds of interviews require thorough preparation. The researcher may use the same consent form for participants in both settings and use the same summary (calling card) to explain the purpose of the study. The researcher should spend time establishing rapport at the start of the session. The researcher is responsible to manage time well so that the interview happens in approximately the amount of time promised to the participants. The researcher also needs to monitor the process so that all questions on the interview protocol are asked. The researcher thanks participants and writes up observations after group interviews, just as she would after individual interviews.

There are also key differences. In a one-on-one interview, the researcher can focus their attention on a single person. In a group setting, the researcher frequently must divide their attention. For instance, during a focus group, one person may be speaking while three others have raised their hands, indicating that they would like to say something. The researcher needs to indicate interest in what the speaker is saying, but also signal that she is aware that others want their turns to speak. Conducting a group interview might feel more like running a business meeting following parliamentary procedure than getting answers to questions of interest to the researcher. Conducting one-on-one interviews is like playing the oboe; leading a focus group is like playing an organ.

Nevertheless, there are powerful benefits from the use of focus groups as a data collection technique. One benefit is to collect maximum data in a minimum amount of time. Focus groups typically number seven to fifteen people. A focus group lasting ninety minutes to two hours can generate data that would take many more hours to collect from one-on-one interviews. The key benefit of focus groups, however, is the creative interaction that comes from having a group of knowledgeable persons (study participants) discuss your research topic in a structured way. The give and take among group members frequently generates a clearer picture (or, perhaps, a series of more vivid pictures) than individual interviews. "A group possesses the capacity to become more than the sum of its parts, to exhibit a synergy that individuals alone don't possess" (Krueger and Casey 2000, 24).

Focus groups have been used for many purposes, including marketing research. For instance, focus group members could each eat three samples of chocolate and discuss which one they preferred. Such a group helps a company test consumer preferences. The ending to more than one Hollywood movie has been changed because of the reactions of viewers at test screenings of a rough cut of the film. Test audiences are one kind of focus group. Of course, in a qualitative research study, a focus group is assembled to create data to answer research questions.

This part of chapter 5 discusses group interviewing. First, the distinctive challenges of the logistics of conducting focus groups are introduced. Second, what should happen during a focus group is described in detail, including the traditional funnel approach, a phenomenological variation of the dump, lump, and name (DLN) focus group, and asynchronous online focus groups. Third, issues faced by researchers as they conduct focus groups are revisited.

Focus Group Logistics

The logistics of running focus groups are more complex than conducting one-on-one interviews with respect to recruiting participants, finding a place for the event, planning activities, and capturing results. Let's look at each of these elements in turn.

Recruiting

Experience teaches that not everyone who promises that they will show up for a focus group does. For that reason, the researcher should recruit a few more participants than she imagines will be needed. There are no standards for the size of focus groups. Since focus groups involve discussion, however, there are upper limits to the number of participants who can voice their ideas in an hour or hour and a half. Researchers generally suggest twelve as an upper limit (Guest, Namey, and Mitchell 2013, 176; Krueger and Casey 2000, 73). Northcutt and McCoy (2004, 87) put the upper limit at twenty because, as I will explain below, in their distinctive approach, group discussion is less important than silent brainstorming. To think about the challenge of recruiting a useful number of study participants to take part in a focus group, complete the following exercise.

Exercise: You Are Cordially Invited For each scenario below, the researcher has chosen to conduct a focus group of the stated size. How many positive responses to an invitation would you want to have to make sure that you meet your target for the size of the group?

- You want a group of 5 to 7.
- You want a group of 8 to 10.
- You want a group of at least 10, but no more than 15.

Perhaps your answers to this exercise reveals your view of human nature. Unless you have an ongoing relationship with people that you are recruiting for the group, I would advise against trusting that all seven people I recruited in the first example will, in fact, take part. In each case, I would invite a few more participants than my desired number. I would be most concerned if I had a group of only three or four when I would rather have six or seven. If I thought that I could make the group work with nine or ten (should everyone invited attend), that is how many I would invite. Similarly, I would invite more than ten persons if I wanted my group to have between eight and ten participants. In the final case, I might be happy with positive responses from fourteen or fifteen persons, since ten is my lower desired limit.

Because a focus group happens on a definite date and involves several people, the invitation to take part should clearly state the date, time, and place for the event. I actively touch base with respondents who have said yes to my invitation so that they do not lose track of their promise to take part. It is easier to reschedule a one-on-one interview than a focus group.

Thought Problem My advice about how many attendees to recruit is based on my experience working with persons in higher education in Canada and the United States. How does my cultural background influence my opinions? Are you part of a society in which you would confidently rely that everyone who agreed to take part in a focus group would show up for it?

Space for Focus Groups

To conduct a good focus group, the researcher needs a suitable space. It may be fine to interview one person in a public place like a coffee shop, but a focus group should have its own space with visual and sound barriers to keep the group safely engaged. Because the researcher will distribute consent forms and perhaps other handouts, a good space includes a suitably sized table and comfortable chairs. The room should have adequate lighting and ventilation. If the researcher wants to play a video or show images, the room needs to have the appropriate technology in place. People often arrive at various times before a focus group begins. It is helpful to have a room large enough to have a hospitality area near the door (with refreshments), with the working area at the far side of the room. If anyone taking part in the focus group uses a wheelchair, then furniture in the room needs to be arranged to enable that person to participate fully during the session.

Planning Focus Group Activities

Focus group activities can involve questions, answers, and discussion but may also include other activities that help participants think and discuss the topics of concern to the researcher. As you consider using focus groups as a technique for data collection, it is important to think about activities in addition to talking. For instance, at the start of a focus group, the researcher might intentionally set a mood by showing a short video. The researcher may have participants think individually about a question or topic, then bring the group together for discussion. For instance, the theological school that I work for conducted several focus groups of church members intended to help the school think about how it might revise its Master of Divinity degree (the three-year degree required in many Protestant denominations for ordination). The school wanted church members and graduates in ministry to think about what they expected from their pastors in terms of what a good minister "is able to do" (skills), what she "is committed to" (values, theology, and emphases in ministry), and what she "is like" (personality). During each focus group, participants were given a page with these three headings and asked to jot down their own ideas. Discussion began with individuals sharing what they had written down. The discussion took off in many directions, but gathering ideas silently from each participant was an important activity in each event. At the end of the session, the individual sheets were collected.

To further your thinking about what might happen at a qualitative research focus group, complete the following exercise.

Exercise: Talk and Not Talk at Focus Groups A focus group may generate data from several kinds of activities. What are the benefits and drawbacks of the following non-verbal activities?

- Participants watch two short videos of the same person delivering a sermon in two distinct styles prior to a discussion about preaching.
- Participants individually write down their ideas before the group begins discussion (as in the example of interviewing church members in the previous paragraph).
- Participants are given crayons and paper and told to draw a picture related to the general topic of the discussion.

In the first example, a benefit of having the group watch the videos together is that the group will have had a common experience. Discussion can become more concrete because participants will be commenting on something that each of them knows about (two specific videos) as well as previous experiences of listening to sermons. A benefit of doing some private thinking and writing (example two) before discussion is that each participant has time to express herself on paper before voicing ideas before the group. They are free from the burden of reacting to what someone else says which may confirm or contradict their own ideas. To put it another way, asking focus group participants to write down their opinions before group discussion is a way to limit self-censoring. The third example (drawing a picture) taps into human creativity. Moods may be expressed by emojis or the use of different colors. Unless everyone in the room is a professional artist, sharing drawings may also inject elements of humor and humility into the discussion. The researcher might show his own example of a drawing to help participants realize that drawings are not being judged for technical skill.

There are drawbacks to these methods as well. Some individuals are more comfortable expressing their ideas out loud than in writing. If a video does not make a connection with viewers, they may mentally drop out of the group. The invitation to playfulness (the third example) may appeal to some but not to others. Nevertheless, novice researchers should consider using activities in addition to discussion when planning focus groups.

> **Thought Problem** Why might a researcher choose activities not involving discussion in a focus group? Try to imagine reasons other than the ones that I noted above. How do you feel about using these kinds of activities in your own study? Remember, focus group activities should logically relate to the researcher's goal of collecting data that answers one or more research questions of a study.

Recording Focus Group Data

Focus groups pose special problems for recording data. In individual interviews, the main tools for recording are some kind of recording device and the notes made by the interviewer. A focus group may be challenging to record because of ambient noise in the room and the number of speakers. An audio recording device may pick up speakers close to it quite well but not persons who are seated further away. When listening to a recording, it is much more difficult to keep track of who is speaking in a focus group than when listening to a one-on-one interview. Is this voice speaker 1 or speaker 4? The possibilities of cross talk and side conversations make it difficult to transcribe focus groups with precision. Professionals charge more to transcribe a group discussion than for a two-person interview. Some of the limitations of audio recording can be overcome by using a video recorder. Video recording also captures gestures and tones of voice. However, issues of capturing human speech remain because of where microphones are positioned relative to speakers.

By asking participants to draw something or write something down in a focus group, the researcher creates documentary data that is portable. The researcher should collect any artifacts produced during the event (drawings, lists, etc.) from participants and the researcher's own work (e.g., a summary of the key discussion). Group discussion benefits when the facilitator notes key words on newsprint, a chalkboard, or computer screen for the entire group to see. It is far easier to summarize ideas about a good minister's skills, values, and personality because focus group participants wrote their ideas down and did not just talk about them.

What Happens in a Focus Group: Six Steps

As we have seen, the logistics of focus groups are complex. Next we turn to what actually happens during a group interview. The list below outlines the steps. I will discuss each step in turn.

> **Step 1**: **Arrivals and Hospitality.** The researcher has all materials in hand (consent forms, recorder, handouts, name tags, refreshments) and arrives early to the interviewing location. The researcher arranges the space so that name tags and refreshments are near the door. The researcher welcomes each arrival, offers refreshments, and asks each person to wear a name tag. The researcher builds rapport among the group through small talk.
>
> **Step 2: Call to Order.** The researcher moves participants from the refreshment area to the work area. After a formal welcome, the researcher provides a brief overview of the study and gives interviewees two copies of the consent form. The interviewees are given time to read the form and ask questions before signing. The researcher gives each participant time to fill out a form with background information. If the researcher has an assistant, the researcher introduces him or her.
>
> **Step 3: Overview of the Event and Ground Rules.** The researcher describes the purpose of the event and lays out ground rules for participation. Participants are invited to ask questions.
>
> **Step 4: Action.** The researcher turns on the recording device, if used. Following a written focus group protocol, the researcher guides participants through discussion and other activities. This stage of the focus group takes up most of the group's time.
>
> **Step 5: Thanks.** As the event concludes, the researcher thanks the interviewee and reinforces the value of the participant's contribution to the study.
>
> **Step 6: Follow Up.** The researcher backs up recorded data and safely stores the consent forms. The researcher collects any artifacts produced by the focus group. The researcher may write field notes and debriefs with an assistant. The researcher sends thank-you emails.

Let's work through these steps in order.

Step 1. Because a focus group involves more than two people, managing arrivals is more complicated than in the case of an individual interview. Name tags are useful unless the researcher knows confidently that everyone in the group already knows everyone else. Even then, name tags are useful to the researcher so that she can invite individuals to speak by name during the event. Discussions of everyday topics as the group gathers builds rapport. Offering refreshments sets a tone of hospitality.

Step 2. Depending on how chatty people are, the researcher may need to be graciously insistent about moving people away from refreshments to the work area. I find it helpful to distribute consent forms ahead of time at tables in the work area of the room. Participants need to complete consent forms at this point, asking questions as needed. Encourage participants to provide other background information on a separate form at the start of the event. Collect consent and background forms, making sure that you have both a signed consent and a background information form from each attendee. This is also a good time to introduce a

helper, should the researcher have one. I will say more about the benefits of having an assistant below.

Step 3. After forms have been collected, the researcher provides a brief overview of the event, focusing on what participants will be asked to do. When leading a group of relative strangers, it is helpful to spend the time to have each participant introduce him or herself. I like to do this by saying something like "Since we will be working together for the next 90 minutes, I invite you to say your name, where you are from and [something about X]," where X is their connection to the topic of the focus group. For instance, when leading a focus group of ministers on the topic of their lives and work, I asked each person to say how long they had been serving their current congregation. These small disclosures help to create a sense of togetherness and helps the researcher ask follow-up questions later in the event. Next, the researcher should state the rules that will guide the discussion. The bolded text below contains a sample of how I explain conversational rules for a focus group. Before you read it, jot down your own ideas about what focus group participants ought to know before discussion of the research topic begins. Draw on your own experiences leading groups, being part of groups, and teaching. Also draw on what you have learned about your ethical obligations to participants and why qualitative researchers collect data.

Four Ground Rules for a Focus Group

- First, everyone gets to have his or her own opinion. You are here because I value your opinion and want to learn from you.
- Second, everyone in the group is worthy of respect.
- Third, we are not here to solve a problem or to try to reach a consensus. Instead our purpose is to think together about [our topic].
- Fourth, it is important for everyone to speak freely without worrying about repercussions afterwards. Therefore, don't share what others say in the group after we have finished without specific permission. Please respect others by honoring confidentiality.

These four rules establish some important boundaries for the ensuing conversation. The purpose of a focus group, unlike a lawyer conducting a cross-examination, is *not for anyone to win anything*. As a researcher, I value hearing a variety of opinions. It is important to remind participants, therefore, that the process will not lead to a vote of some kind. When participants are treated respectfully and assured of confidentiality, they are more likely to take the risk of speaking honestly in front of strangers. Of course, the researcher needs to model respect during the conduct of the event. I have found the third ground rule (there is nothing to fix here and no one's mind needs changing) to be very helpful if the discussion becomes contentious. I have often said sentences like "It's perfectly fine that Megan and Travis don't agree. Remember, we aren't trying to change anybody's mind today. We are letting everyone share their experiences and opinions." I keep the list of ground rules as short as possible. I do not say, for instance, that I will monitor time and keep the process moving, even though a facilitator (the researcher) does that. Keep the focus of the rules on what the participants themselves will do during the event. These ground rules work well for a group using a phenomenological approach. You should change them to fit the research approach that you are using. For instance, in a project approach you might want the group to think about ministry

opportunities facing a congregation and to select an opportunity that the group agrees is very important. In that case, rule three would not apply.

> **Thought Problem** How might you need to change the ground rules for a focus group because you are aware that the unwritten rules of conversation for attendees differ dramatically from those that I presumed? How does the researcher balance her intersectionality and positionality as an expert, guest, and outsider by thinking about this issue?

Step 4. Most of the group's time is spent in the actions carefully planned by the researcher. The classic design of the focus group process is a *funnel*. The researcher starts discussion with a relatively innocuous question or two to help the group settle into discussion. Gradually, the questions become more pointed, leading to the final questions that provide the researcher with the most-desired data. To think about sequencing questions in a funnel fashion for a focus group, complete the exercise below. Then read my comments.

> **Exercise: Shaping the Conversational Funnel** During the COVID-19 pandemic, the act of wearing a face mask was contentious in many places in the United States. You are conducting a study of members of Mountaintop Lutheran Church (MLC). You have no first-hand experience of MLC, but the congregational council granted you permission to recruit participants for your study. The pastor of MLC has told you that "the wearing of a mask issue" was real for members. Your two research questions (RQs) are:
>
> - **RQ 1.** How do study participants describe their decision to wear or not wear a face mask?
> - **RQ 2.** How do study participants say that their Christian beliefs influenced their decision to wear or not wear a face mask?
>
> How would you shape the activities of a focus group containing both mask-wearers and those who chose not to wear masks? Specifically, how would you sequence questions for discussion?

Here is my thought process for deciding how to run this focus group. Of course, I may make assumptions that differ from yours and come to different conclusions than you did. In this case, I need to determine which aspects of my research questions will be most contentious. Based on the limited information in the scenario, I think that asking about theological views (RQ 2) is more fraught than the first research question. Therefore, as the event begins, I might display photographs of people wearing masks and others who are not. I might have participants jot down their reactions on paper. The first part of the discussion could be going around the room and hearing everyone's reactions. I would not be surprised if I needed to use my moderating skills to remind the group of the ground rules about respect and purpose of the group (especially the non-purpose of not trying to change anyone's mind). I would then move from the impersonal (looking at photographs of strangers) to the personal by saying something like, "You have expressed a variety of reactions to our opening activity. Now, I would like to get a little more personal and have you talk about your own personal decisions about whether to wear a mask or not." If I detected some emerging patterns in the discussion (such themes as distrusting the government, trusting in science, knowing someone

personally who contracted COVID-19, etc.), I would ask the group if I had been hearing them correctly. I know from experience that a facilitator who demonstrates to the satisfaction of the group that he has been tracking discussion accurately is seen as more trustworthy by the group. I would write down phrases spoken by participants on a board or display monitor large enough for everyone in the group to see.

Finally, I would shift discussion to RQ 2, how Christian beliefs influenced participants regarding the question of wearing a mask. The most conversational way to do this would be to pick up on something that a participant said. For instance, I might say something like "A few minutes ago, Charlie said 'If God wants me to get sick, I will. That's in the Bible. So no mask will keep me safe.' For the rest of our time together, I'd like to hear from *everyone* about how your Christian faith and reading the Bible helped you decide whether or not to wear a face mask." Because I am interested in collecting data about RQ 2, I would need to turn the discussion to questions of religious belief even if no one had voiced explicitly theological opinions to this point. If you talked about faith in your introduction of the topic (which you should have done!), no one will be surprised when you ask the group to talk about wearing a mask from a theological perspective. If I could not make a smooth transition based on words spoken aloud by group members, I might say something like "One of the things I'm interested in hearing more about is how your faith as Christians guided you when you decided whether or not to wear a face mask. Would someone like to share?" If appropriate, I would also invoke humor by saying: "I won't tell the pastor if someone misquotes the Small Catechism. Remember, what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." For a certain kind of Lutheran, that comment is reasonably funny.

To summarize: in the example above, I have created a funnel with three levels of focus. At the beginning, I gently introduced the topic using visual aids (level one). Then I made the focus tighter by asking participants to speak about their individual experience in some detail (level two). Finally, I posed the most interesting (and contentious) question towards the end of the event (level three). While the researcher thinks about these activities with respect to research questions and data collection, there is no reason to introduce this jargon into the group's work. The participants will be guided by the leader to work through whatever activities the researcher has designed. Keep the focus on hearing about the experiences and opinions of the experts in the room, the study participants.

> **Thought Problem: Facilitating a Focus Group** In shaping a focus group like a funnel, a key skill is making transitions between key discussion questions. How much can the researcher plan before the event begins? How much requires creative response to what people say in the group? How do you feel about your skills to lead focus groups? What do you need to help you feel more comfortable?

Step 5. In a well-planned focus group, the researcher moves participants through discussion related to all parts of the focus group protocol. The researcher should clearly signal that discussion is wrapping up and end by thanking participants. Remember, without data a researcher cannot answer her research questions. She should feel grateful and express that gratitude to participants. If the researcher has told participants that they might receive a summary of the group's discussion, it is good practice to remind those interested to provide contact information on a separate sign-up sheet.

When done well, participants in focus groups frequently feel that they have had a good time. Some may comment that they did not know that they had so much to say about the topic until someone asked them. Sometimes a participant calls the researcher aside and makes comments that she or he did not feel comfortable saying in the group. It is helpful to write

notes about such comments; they qualify as data from the focus group. The researcher might also reflect on changes that she might make to facilitate future groups to encourage reluctant participants to express themselves within the formal framework of the focus group.

Step 6. By the end of a 90-minute or two-hour focus group, many researchers are worn out from the demands of facilitation. Nevertheless, the researcher needs to collect consent forms and any artifacts produced by the group. If the researcher has had an assistant or helper (more about using assistants here in this chapter), having a post-session conversation with the assistant might help the researcher get a better understanding of group dynamics or what was said. Because we begin to forget quickly, it is helpful to write or record one's own impressions of the event as fieldnotes. Some researchers conduct more than one focus group on the same topic. If so, it is especially important to record notes about one's own performance or logistical problems that arose during the event. The researcher wants to avoid repeating such mistakes. Back in the office, the researcher should safely store documents and back up any recorded data. The researcher may also send brief thank-you notes or emails.

So far in our discussion of focus groups as a data collection method, we have noted that researchers carefully structure a script or protocol for the event as they would for an individual interview. Focus groups are more complicated than one-on-one interviews because the researcher is working with several people, each of whom deserves the opportunity to share their own experiences. In addition to talking, the researcher might have group members write down ideas or even draw a picture. We have noted that the funnel approach to sequencing questions begins with more general or less contentious aspects of the researcher's topic, then proceeds to more specific or touchy dimensions of the topic.

> **Thought Problem: Focus Groups in Real Time** YouTube is a great resource for increasing your understanding of how focus groups work. It is worth your time to watch recorded focus groups to see varieties of leadership styles and activities as they unfold in real time. Use the search feature in YouTube and search for "running focus groups." Look for content produced by universities or known experts. For instance, a recording of Richard Krueger leading an event is available.

A Phenomenological Variation: the DLN Focus Group

Before proceeding, I want to introduce a distinctive technique for running focus groups as articulated by Northcutt and McCoy (2004, especially 85–103). This technique is useful when the researcher takes a phenomenological (open-ended) approach to a study and can conduct one or more focus groups followed by individual interviews. This approach is sometimes called the dump, lump, and name (DLN) technique. The list below states the flow of activities in this approach. Of course, the researcher has done a great deal of preparation prior to leading the focus group. She has chosen the topic, created guided imagery, and gathered all the materials that participants will use.

What Happens in a DLN Focus Group

Step 1: Preparation and Hospitality. The researcher has all materials in hand (including a recording device, nametags, and refreshments) and arrives at the event location well in advance. Each participant needs consent forms, a stack of index cards and a marker or pen. The researcher places these materials where participants will

sit. The researcher should have extra cards to hand out as needed. The researcher welcomes each arrival, offers refreshments, and asks each person to wear a name tag. The researcher builds rapport among the group through small balk.

Step 2: Call to Order. Participants move from the refreshment area to the work area. After a welcome, the researcher provides a brief overview of the study and gives the interviewee two copies of the consent form. The interviewee is given time to read the form and ask questions before signing. The researcher gives the participant time to fill out a form with background information. The researcher explains why there are cards and pens for each participant.

Step 3: Overview and Ground Rules. The researcher describes the purpose of the event and lays out ground rules for participation. Participants are invited to ask questions. The researcher introduces the main topic, stressing that each person's perspective is important.

Step 4: Guided Imagery. The researcher uses guided imagery to introduce the main topic. At the end of the guided imagery, the researcher says "tell me about [main idea]. Write one word or phrase at a time on your cards. Every idea is welcome."

Step 5: Silent Brainstorming (Dump). Participants write their ideas about the topic on cards. The researcher provides more cards to participants as needed.

Step 6: Lump. All cards are moved to a table and laid out in columns. The order does not matter. As directed by the leader, participants next arrange cards into clusters of words or phrases that go together. In larger groups, the arranging is done in two waves. Participants should arrange the cards as much as possible without talking.

Step 7: Name. The researcher discusses the clusters of cards with participants. The goal is to come up with a name for each cluster. The group assigns a preliminary name for each group of cards. The researcher should work through as many cards as possible in the time available.

Step 8: Thanks. The researcher thanks the interviewee and reinforces the value of the participant's contribution to the study.

Step 9: Follow-up. The researcher collects all cards, keeping them in groups. The researcher writes fieldnotes and/or debriefs with an assistant. The researcher sends thank-you emails. The researcher enters background information into a database or spreadsheet and safely stores consent forms.

Step 10: Post-group Analysis. The researcher refines the names of themes identified by the group. The researcher writes definitions for each refined theme.

Step 11: Interview Protocol. The researcher writes an individual interviewing protocol using the themes and definitions discovered by the focus group.

Let's work through these steps in order. Steps 1 through 3 are almost the same as for a standard (funnel) focus group. The researcher needs to explain that participants are given with cards and pens because they will be asked to write down their ideas as part of the group's work together.

Step 4. In the DLN process, the researcher uses guided imagery to introduce the topic. Guided imagery centers the group on its task and invites each participant to think about her own experiences with the topic under consideration. I frequently ask participants to close their eyes, take a deep breath, and then listen as I evoke aspects of the topic under study. For example, when I used this technique to think about what it is like to be a minister, my guided imagery walked through a work week for a minister serving a congregation. The imagery should be evocative to let past experiences and feelings about the topic under discussion bubble up. I always write a script detailing what to say. Examples of guided imagery are included as appendices B and C. I have sometimes invited participants to look at a slideshow of images related to the topic. The point of this part of the session is to introduce the topic in a way that opens up memory and imagination without signaling any specific things that might interest the researcher. At the conclusion of the imagery, the facilitator immediately gives the instruction to "Tell me about [the main topic]. Write one word or phrase at a time on your cards. Every idea is welcome."

Step 5. Participants respond to prompt. They write in silence. This is the moment of truth for the researcher. If she has done her work well, participants will do something they seldom do in daily life: write down ideas from their stream of consciousness, one at a time, about the focus of the researcher's study. Researchers new to this approach should take heart: participants always have things to say. They always write on the cards. If the facilitator notices that someone is not writing, she can quietly ask if that person has questions about what to do next. Sometimes individuals need more clarity about writing just one thing per card; sometimes individuals say that they are still thinking about what to write. The researcher should honor each participant's thinking and writing approach.

Notice that the researcher has employed a great deal of power in selecting the topic, creating the guided imagery, and instructing participants about how to share their preliminary thoughts. However, the researcher does not tell anyone *what* to write down. The experts in the room are the study participants. Indeed, the whole process is arranged so that participants do not know very much at all about the researcher's views on the topic. This is intentional, since the researcher wants to get at group reality by letting the group silently voice ideas about the topic.

Step 6. After silent brainstorming (dump) comes lumping. The researcher moves the cards to a large table. As an alternative, cards can be taped to a wall. The researcher and the assistant should spread the cards out randomly. To conserve time, I sometimes ask a participant to help lay out the cards. It is not necessary to keep cards by a single author together. If the group is larger than five persons, I divide the group into two teams. The well-worn technique of numbering off "one, two, one, two" repeatedly works just fine. I ask team one to approach the table and look at the cards. I instruct them to put cards that belong together into clusters, in columns. I also ask them to do this without speaking. I tell them that cards can be moved around as many times as needed.

After team one has worked for several minutes, the researcher will notice preliminary clusters of cards are emerging. At this point, I thank team one and ask them to return to their places. I invite team two to continue putting the cards that belong together into groups. I encourage them to revise the work of the first group if they wish to. After a couple of minutes, I allow them to speak as they continue moving cards around. It is appropriate for the focus group leader to hover around the table as participants clump cards, but at this point she should not express any opinions. When the facilitator notices that almost all of the cards have been clumped into a category, she thanks the second team and asks them to sit down.

Step 7. The most challenging step for facilitators is the naming phase. Only now does group discussion begin. The purpose of the discussion is to name the categories discovered by the group. Below are directions for this step.

Naming Clusters in DLN Focus Group

Purpose: Lead a discussion about the cards in their preliminary clusters to refine the clusters and determine a name for each.

- Review the clusters of cards. What organizational principle is at work? Find the *most homogeneous* group of cards.
- Read aloud all the cards from the cluster. Then ask the group: "What do these cards have in common?"
- During discussion, repeatedly ask, "Who wrote this card? What did you mean by it?"
- With the consent of the group, move cards around between clusters when necessary. *It is always necessary.*
- Work your way through *all* the clusters. At this point, you should have several clusters of cards, each about a subtopic of your main topic of interest.
- Be ready to suggest that some clusters might be combined. However, honor the group's decision.
- In a second round of discussion, have the group assign a **preliminary name** to each cluster in turn. Write the name down on a new card—don't rely on memory. The name might change as the group talks and recombines cards and/or clusters of cards.
- **Continue discussion** until almost all the cards have been assigned to a cluster and the group has agreed to names for each category.

During this discussion, the researcher leads the group to discover its preferred name for a cluster of cards. For instance, a series of cards containing the words "frustration, frustrated, pleased, happy, puzzled" might be put into a category named "Emotions." A series of cards containing the words "time, no time, not enough time, where did the time go!, too busy" might be put in a category named "Time." When using this technique, I often say to participants "What do these cards have in common? This isn't a trick question. It's okay to state the obvious."

In 90 minutes, researchers using the DLN focus group technique can move through all the stages of the process with a group of 10–15 participants. At the start of the group, the researcher will pose a sole key question "Tell me about X." The content of the responses and the structure of the responses (the categories) all come from study participants. In this approach, most of the group discussion is about the data points written on cards. In my experience, some participants will write fewer than ten cards; a few will write twenty or more. Discussion is enhanced when there are a lot of cards on the table (literally). The group's feeling of accomplishment with the session comes from working through the cards and achieving general (but, often, not unanimous) agreement on the names of categories.

Steps 8 and 9. As in a funnel focus group, the researcher thanks participants and collects the artifacts of the day. I briefly tell the group that I will use their hard work analysis to create interview questions for the next stage of data collection. At the end of a DLN focus

group, there is a literal pile of data sitting on the worktable. The researcher needs to keep the cards together by theme. I bring plastic bags with me and place all the cards for one theme in the same baggie. I make sure that I know which card contains the tentative name of each category. Using a card of a different color from all the rest as the title card is helpful. As soon as is practical, I back up these precious data by scanning the cards or retyping them into a word processing document or spreadsheet.

Steps 10 and 11. As described in Appendix D, the researcher reflects on the categories and names uncovered by the group. The researcher follows a set of rules for refining the names of categories, such as combining some categories (e.g., to merge a category called "Positive Feelings" with another called "Negative Feelings" into a single, general category called "Emotions"). These categories become open-ended questions to use in individual interviews to explore the researcher's topic in more depth.

What is the benefit of using the DLN technique? The researcher comes away from the focus group with a series of themes that she can ask about in more detail during individual interviews. For instance, in response to a prompt "Tell me about being a pro-life activist," a DLN focus group comprised of pro-life campaigners will generate a series of themes about this topic that are birthed by participants *themselves*, not by notions that the researcher has in mind in advance or, for that matter, what published research might say. In other words, the DLN technique creates an environment in which aspects of the group's experiences (whether that experience is being a pro-life activist or reading the Bible devotionally) can emerge authentically.

Thought Problem What are the advantages and disadvantages of the DLN technique for focus groups compared to the funnel technique? Might a researcher committed to a liberationist or project approach benefit from collecting data using the DLN technique? What skills does the researcher need to lead both kinds of focus groups?

Asynchronous Online Focus Groups

In addition to face-to-face focus groups, the online environment enables the possibility of modifying focus group techniques to take advantage of the distinctive affordances of the Internet. One development is asynchronous online focus groups. This approach does not use real-time interactions between participants (unlike holding a meeting on Zoom). Instead, a researcher posts a series of questions based on his focus group protocol and then receives responses from participants. Conversational interaction happens as participants react to what others posted. If you think that this sounds very much like how many distance educators use learning management systems in asynchronous online courses, you are correct. Nevertheless, this technique is a focus group, since "focus groups, in both face-to-face and virtual contexts involve, by definition, a moderated discussion of a topic under the direction of a skilled moderator by a group of volunteer and informed discussants who have been recruited for purposes of discussion" (Stewart and Shamdasani 2017, 50). The medical community has used asynchronous online focus groups to help understand such things as the recovery process following surgery (Boateng and Nelson 2016) and how nurses work with cancer patients (Slev et al 2017).

The planning process for an asynchronous online focus group is essentially the same as for a face-to-face group. In both cases the researchers must recruit participants and develop a focus group protocol so that the data collected answers research questions. An asynchronous online group is distinctive for two reasons. First, the interactions happen via writing

and reading text rather than speaking words. Second, group interactions happen in slow motion in comparison to the back-and-forth of a face-to-face group. The researcher might post the first question for discussion and allow several days for responses to arrive online. The researcher then posts the second question for discussion. Because of this leisurely pace, the researcher has time to digest responses before posting the next question for discussion.

Asynchronous focus groups offer several advantages to the researcher. First, she might be able to recruit persons across a larger geographical territory than for a face-to-face group. Second, because participants are writing responses on some digital platform (e.g., Facebook), the researcher has transcribed data for thematic analysis right away. Third, the researcher does not have to make as many split-second decisions about facilitation as in face-to-face settings. Williams and her colleagues note that online participation does not reveal the participant's body or ethnicity visually (Williams et al. 2012). This kind of anonymity of self-presentation may encourage participants to take part without reservation.

Conducting research via asynchronous online focus groups also presents some challenges. Jot down your own ideas in the following exercise before reading my comments below.

> **Exercise: Challenges of the Asynchronous Online Focus Group** Drawing on your own experiences in taking online classes and using social media, what distinctive challenges to data gathering does an asynchronous online approach face? How might you mitigate them?

Three challenges to this approach are building group rapport, keeping participants engaged, and vetting responses for appropriateness. To begin with, one challenge of the asynchronous online format is keeping participants engaged in a process that might cover two or three weeks. To meet this challenge, Slev and colleagues systematically sent email alerts whenever a new question was posted (Slev et al. 2017). Second, the researcher wants to keep everyone engaged without rewarding some responses more than others. Researchers might send out "highlights" messages from time to time. For instance, researchers might note the most common responses to some questions and the variety of responses to others. This is roughly analogous to a researcher in a face-to-face group saying, "What I am hearing from most of the group is . . . but others think . . ." Third, researchers using the asynchronous online approach might need to review responses for appropriateness to the purposes of the research. To put it another way, the researcher must make sure that responses are on topic and do not put down the responses of others. If the researcher is using learning management system software for data collection, she may have the ability to review all posts before they become visible to everyone in the group. In a worst-case scenario, the researcher could withdraw privileges from a misbehaving participant, effectively firing him from the group. How did your ideas compare to mine?

> **Thought Problem** Given your skill set and the demands on your time, would you prefer leading a face-to-face focus group or an asynchronous online group?

Facilitating Face to Face Groups

The researcher who conducts individual interviews or leads focus groups should be prepared, respectful, and an attentive listener. The researcher will give verbal and non-verbal feedback. When puzzled by a response, the researcher will ask for clarification. Because a

focus group is not just two people talking, the researcher is constantly addressing the needs of a group. The problem of whose turn it is to speak did not first appear when the world began using Zoom for business meetings and schoolwork. The focus group leader needs to take charge of who speaks when. For instance, she may establish a ground rule that says, "if you have something to say, raise your hand and I will call on you." If you have led a Bible study, been part of a youth group (or led one), or attended a staff meeting, you have seen examples of better and worse group facilitation. These experiences will help you lead focus groups to maximize participation and minimize clumsiness.

As the leader of the group, the researcher wants to encourage conversation so that the best versions of the group's ideas come to light. At the same time, the researcher does not want to prize some opinions and denigrate others. The kind of feedback that might be helpful in a one-on-one interview might be misconstrued in a group setting. Krueger and Casey note, for instance, that an affirmative head nod can signal encouragement to a speaker. Does encouragement mean agreement with the speaker's sentiments? That is not clear. Similarly, short responses like "OK" might signal that the researcher is tracking what the speaker is saying. However, comments like "That's good" or "Excellent" might be taken as value judgements. Since the facilitator seeks to welcome all opinions, she should avoid phrases and gestures that can be construed as preferring some comments to others (Krueger and Casey 2000, 112–13). What role should humor play in focus groups? I have led focus groups on many serious subjects over the years. In almost every case, there has been laughter. I have occasionally set the ground rule "If something is funny, it is okay to laugh" at the start of a session. I take laughter as a sign that the group feels comfortable enough to be playful. Laughter and banter frequently happen when the participants in a focus group know each other well. Leading a focus group, of course, has a different purpose than performing stand-up comedy. The facilitator needs to be ready, when needed, to redirect the group's energy towards the stated work of the group.

Bring your experience to bear on the scenarios in the following exercise. Write down your thoughts about each scenario before reading my comments below.

Exercise: Come out to the coast, we'll get together, have a few laughs. Imagine that you are conducting a focus group to gather data for your study. What would you do in the following situations? Why?

- You have given an overview of the process for your focus group. Five minutes later, someone says "I don't understand why we're wasting time looking at these pictures. I thought that we were going to talk about things."
- During discussion, one participant dominates conversation. He keeps reminding everyone that he was the CEO of a major insurance company, so he knows what he's talking about.
- You are halfway through your time in a focus group when you realize that only women have spoken; no men have.
- In discussion, it seems that everyone in the group is in complete agreement about everything.
- In response to a question, someone in the group makes a short speech expressing her opinion. She concludes by saying that those who disagree with her are wrong.
- In the middle of your group, the church janitor bursts into the room and says a tornado is close by. He orders everyone to the basement.

In the first example, it appears that at least one person in the group does not fully understand the researcher's plan for the event or is a bit impatient for something interesting to happen. At this point, the researcher might provide a little more information than she gave at the start of the session, or might say something like "Yes, we will talk soon. I promise that all the pieces will fit together." In the second example (which is based on actual events), a member of the group appeals to her or his distinctive expertise as being superior to that of others in the group. The best response for the researcher is to remind the expert that, for purposes of the group, *everyone* is an expert and that everyone's opinion matters.

The third example points to the challenges that the facilitator faces in including everyone in a discussion. If people are talking about the topic and staying on point, the novice researcher will be happy and rightly so. Depending on the topic and the flow of discussion, the researcher in this scenario might simply invite one of the men to speak. "Kevin, I'd like to hear what you think about . . ." Are gender dynamics at work in the group? Most likely, yes. The question for the researcher is: for the purpose of collecting good data for my study, is it important to draw attention to them? What a group facilitator would say in a therapy group might be quite different than what the leader of a focus group might say. In a qualitative research focus group, the researcher is not trying to help participants come to psychological insight. Some focus group participants are "reflective thinkers [who] tend to say little" (Krueger and Casey 2000, 111). The researcher may have discovered who such participants are when recruiting members for the group or during informal conversation before the session began. The researcher may focus extra eye contact on quieter members of the group. As the group leader, it is appropriate simply to invite someone who has not spoken to express an opinion.

In the fourth example (universal peace and harmony), it appears that politeness has triumphed. To break through the crust, the researcher might say something like "Several of you have agreed that you heard a lot of good sermons from your pastor growing up. Does anyone remember a bad sermon? Remember, our purpose today is not to reach agreement, it's to share our own perspectives. And what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." In my experience, once someone in a group expresses a variation of opinion or a dissenting view, the rest of the group feel permitted to speak more freely.

The fifth example (those who are not with me are against me) is an emphatic form of the assertion of exclusive expertise voiced in the second example. Perhaps the best thing for the researcher to do is simply let the comment hang in the air. Another participant might say, "Wait a minute. I have my own thoughts on that subject." In a focus group with good flow, the researcher will have less obvious work to do handling transitions between speakers because the participants will become engaged in the conversation. In other words, they will begin to speak directly to each other and not to the group facilitator. However, it is sometimes necessary for the researcher to remind those present that all views are welcome. A minister or chaplain reading this paragraph might be eager to probe what underlies the hypothetical speaker's need to be absolutely right. In a pastoral or therapeutic context, such a question might be in order. But such concerns are beside the point in a focus group, whose purpose is to collect data related to the investigator's research questions.

The final example should remind us that things sometimes happen that are beyond our control. If your focus group is interrupted by a tornado, seek shelter. When the danger has passed, figure out with participants if it makes sense to continue the session or attempt to reschedule it. Please complete the following exercise. Then read my comments.

Thought Problem: Intersectionality and Group Leadership The author's suggestions about appropriate responses to the six scenarios sketched in the previous

exercise come from his own intersectionality and life experiences as a bourgeois White man. Based on your own intersectionality and life experiences, what responses would make sense to you if you were leading these groups? Would it be easier or harder to lead a focus group with lots of different kinds of people (e.g., persons with differing levels of formal education) in it?

Excursus: Intersectionality and Interviewing

Issues of gender, race, and class are always in play during interviewing, whether one-one-one interviews or leading focus groups. As persons socialized in patriarchal societies, male interviewers or focus group leaders might discount or ignore what women say. Men might be overbearing or condescending. Female researchers might not be treated with the same level of seriousness by male study participants as male researchers would be. A Black researcher leading a focus group of Whites, might be perceived and treated differently than a White focus group leader. One approach to dealing with the complexity of gender dynamics during qualitative research is to segregate the work so that only female researchers interview women and only male researchers interview men. However, such a "solution" can be based on "the false assumption of shared perspectives" (Seidman 2013, 104). Nevertheless, in the world of focus group research, it is not unusual for researchers to conduct male-only and female-only focus groups on the same topic, especially if there is reason to believe that single-gender groups will lead to more open discussion. For instance, to test reactions to materials for a campaign to combat domestic abuse, Keller and Honea conducted four focus groups, two with men and two with women. They found striking differences between the responses of men and women (Keller and Honea 2016). The race of the researcher and study participants makes a difference in qualitative research interviews. Kadushin notes that White researchers interviewing persons of color may need to demonstrate that they are trustworthy by sharing more about themselves than they would if interviewing White people and that White interviewers need to be aware of differences in non-verbal cues and conversational styles between the dominant White culture and the cultural worlds of persons of color (Kadushin 2013, 294-295). When conducting interviews with African American grandmothers, co-researchers Priscilla Gibson and Laura Abrams (one African American and one White) found that interviewing patterns differed depending on whether the researcher was an insider (African American) or an outsider (White). When speaking to the African American researcher, participants often said things like "I'm sure you know exactly what I mean." The researcher responded with probing questions to make sure that the participant articulated her experience for the record. The White researcher reported that she often was given long explanations of cultural commonplaces because her interviewees assumed that a White researcher needed to be filled in on how Black women experience their lives (Gibson and Abrams 2003).

Differences in social class between a researcher and study participants can also create challenges for the researcher during interviews. My imagined audience for this book, for instance, is a person whose level of formal education includes a bachelor's degree, since North American seminary students typically have a BA. Given the increasing costs of higher education, my imagined reader very likely may consider herself middle class. An interviewer who grew up in a home where there were books to read and who attended well-funded public schools (or whose parents paid for private schools) has had life experiences quite different from many Americans. If such a college-educated interviewer conducts research with persons who are food- or housing-insecure, the interviewer will need to structure her

research in ways that respect the differences between herself and her study participants. In the context of interviewing, the researcher needs to test interview questions so that they are intelligible to participants. Sample, for instance, argues that White working class people have distinctive cultural practices and norms, which are frequently glossed over by educated elites—precisely the kind of persons most likely to engage in qualitative research (Sample 2018). The researcher who frankly acknowledges his own positionality as a guest, expert, and outsider is better situated to listen and learn from study participants than a researcher whose manner suggests that she is more learned or cultured than interviewees with different backgrounds.

Gender, race, and class are aspects of each of us, as are our religious commitments and values. There are no generic "men" or "women." There are African American men who may be part of the one percent; there are White men who are poor. There are Lakota women who are well-paid lawyers; there are White women who dropped out of high school to support their families. Persons of faith do not shed their life histories or change the color of their skins simply because they are Christians or belong to a specific part of the Christian church. Even when gender, race, and class are not overt topics of a research study, the researcher must attend to the complexities of intersectionality.

Using Assistants

Because focus groups have so many moving parts, it is useful for a group leader to have an assistant in the room. A ministry student conducting focus groups may be a sole researcher. However, it may be possible to recruit an assistant. For instance, two DMin students using focus groups to collect data may agree to assist each other. Because of the complexity of running a focus group, there is plenty of work for two people to do. An assistant might take charge of moving furniture, checking in participants upon arrival, and helping with name tags. An assistant can collect consent forms and distribute handouts. If the researcher uses the DLN approach, the assistant can save time for the group by collecting cards during silent brainstorming and moving them to the main worktable. A knowledgeable assistant can also helpfully critique the performance of the leader and comment on what seemed to go well (or not so well) with a session. An assistant should honor the ethical boundaries of the study and maintain the confidentiality of discussion during the group. Because of the dynamics of intersectionality, it can be helpful to the data gathering process if the researcher and the assistant differ from each other. For instance, a male researcher may not hear gendered aspects of discussion; a female assistant might call them to the researcher's attention. Debriefing conversations between a researcher and an assistant should always take place out of the hearing of focus group participants.

Choosing Between Individual Interviews and Focus Groups

In designing a study, the researcher needs to make decisions about how to collect data. The lists below summarize the benefits and drawbacks of individual interviewing and focus groups.

Individual Interviews: Benefits

- Good for probing an individual's experiences in depth
- Scheduling involves only two persons
- Can be conducted in many kinds of places, in person and online
- Many opportunities to clarify meanings
- Conversational turn taking is relatively easy
- Novice researchers may feel comfortable at one-on-one dialogue, which feels like everyday conversation

Individual Interviews: Drawbacks

- Researcher collects data from one participant at a time
- The participant is only responding to one person, the researcher

Focus Groups: Benefits

- Good for getting at group understandings
- Discussion among participants can yield novel insights
- One event provides rich data
- Assistant or co-researcher can make observations about group process and clarify participant meaning
- Conducting asynchronous online focus groups can expand the reach of a study and immediately capture data as digital text

Focus Groups: Drawbacks

- Scheduling problems: getting a group of people to show up at the right data and time
- Logistics of setting: (size of room, acoustics, etc.)
- Researcher needs skill to guide group conversation
- For asynchronous online groups, the researcher needs to maintain participant engagement

A researcher can collect good data using either focus groups or individual interviews. The DLN method intentionally uses both kinds of interviewing. Of course, when choosing a data collection technique, the primary question the researcher should ask is: Is interviewing a suitable method, given the research questions of my study? If a study's focus is on individual or group behavior (rather than ideas, beliefs, and perceptions), observation might be a more suitable technique. For instance, if the researcher wants to study how volunteer youth lead-

ers conduct Bible studies with sixth-graders, the appropriate technique for data collection is observation. If the researcher wants to know about how volunteer youth leaders understand their experiences as Bible study leaders with sixth-graders, interviewing is an appropriate technique. Sometimes a researcher might want to explore the conjunctions and disjunctions between ideas and practices. In these cases, she needs to observe and to interview.

> **Thought Problem** What is most appealing to you about conducting individual interviews? What is most appealing to you about focus groups? What aspects of these data gathering techniques are off-putting?

Conclusion

This chapter has described one of the most powerful data collection techniques that qualitative researchers have, interviewing. Poets, philosophers, and novelists remind us that we human beings endlessly use language to create and interpret our social worlds. The qualitative researcher uses structured conversations (whether individual interviews or focus groups) to gain access to the multi-layered experiences of study participants. Individual and group interviewing honors the struggles and experiences of people who know things that the researcher wants to know about. What Rita and John Sommers-Flannagan (2009, 22) say about clinical interviewing applies to interviews in qualitative research studies: "Of the two people sitting in the room, it is the client who is unarguably the best expert about himself or herself." So, why not ask?

The technical steps that the researcher undertakes when interviewing (such as writing out most questions, keeping group discussion on track) serve the needs of the study while showing respect for all participants. Novice researchers might feel intimidated by the complexity of structured interviewing. Take heart. Ministry students who begin to do qualitative research interviews are not starting from scratch. Concern for the lives of people and a willingness to listen a lot and speak a little serve ministry students well as they conduct research interviews.

CHAPTER 5: KEY POINTS

- A research interview is a purposeful conversation.
- All activities in research interviews serve to answer one or more research questions of a study.
- A researcher chooses a location for interviews that ensures privacy and minimizes outside noise.
- To ensure that all qualified participants may contribute, the researcher will modify locations and procedures for interviews to ensure full participation.
- An interview protocol contains the questions that the researcher asks.
- The researcher puts interview questions in a logical sequence.
- Individual interviews allow for in-depth exploration of someone's experience compared to group interviews.
- Researchers use group interviews, or focus groups, to benefit from a group's shared discussion of a topic.
- Focus group activities may include guided imagery, silent brainstorming, drawing, and discussion.
- Conducting a focus group is more complex than conducting an interview with one person.
- Having an assistant when conducting focus groups to manage logistics and offer feedback about group processes can be helpful.
- Both individual interviews and focus groups may be conducted face to face or online.
- Researchers need to be aware of the ways that intersectionality (race, class, gender, etc.) and life experience shape the content and dynamics of individual interviews and focus groups.
- The researcher should collect artifacts from interviews and protect them carefully.

CHAPTER 6

Survey Questions and Descriptive Statistics

Is our country heading in the right direction? Please respond Yes or No.

– Common polling question

Perhaps agreement [on the meaning of measurement] can better be achieved if we recognize that measurement exists in a variety of forms and that scales of measurement fall into certain definite classes.

– Stanley Smith Stevens (1946), psychologist

In the not-too-distant past, I used to answer telephone surveys. In the best cases, the caller maintained a professional tone. The formal language suggested that he or she was reading from a script. Sometimes the caller identified herself as working for a research company. When I asked who was paying for the survey, I was politely told that she was not authorized to provide that information. I used to tell the interviewer that I would start the interview but would stop if I thought that the way questions were asked did not meet my standards of quality. (At my house, one of the things that we don't talk about at family holidays is how to ask survey questions. Much too heated of a topic.) In some cases, I made it through the entire set of questions. At other times, I quickly ended the interview when asked questions along the lines of "Do you agree with Party A's common-sense plan to help people, or do you agree with Party B's cruel plan to hurt people?" In a few instances, I refused to express a preference for any of the options in a list and told the interviewer what I thought in my own words. The best interviewers would try to get me to land on one of the standard options.

As soon as a researcher is concerned with collecting unbiased information from another person with a minimum of discussion, very quickly she discovers how difficult it is to ask "simple questions." There is a science (rooted in research) and an art (built up by practice) to asking questions. This chapter discusses the basics of asking ***survey questions***. The second part of the chapter discusses best practices for tabulating responses to such questions, which necessarily leads to a brief discussion of what social scientists call descriptive statistics. As our second epigraph notes, there are classes of measurement and, therefore, distinct kinds of statistical operations that the researcher can perform on her data, depending on its class. Researchers doing qualitative research need to know how to ask and tabulate the answers to survey questions because all researchers should ask for factual information about study informants to aid interpretation of their findings. For instance, the researcher asks for relevant biographical information in order to know if participant 1 was an older woman who had engaged in the practice of contemplative prayer for many years or a young man who had just begun the practice. Moverover, many researchers will solicit opinions and preferences as part of data collection.

Best Practices for Survey Questions

Questions and Answers

By **survey question**, I mean a question posed in a context where the researcher cannot ask follow-up questions in real time. In qualitative research studies, researchers commonly ask survey questions in an online environment or to collect factual information in written form during a face-to-face interview. Qualitative researchers frequently ask questions that do not need long answers. For instance, researchers commonly need to ask eligibility or screening questions of participants. Depending on the answer, the participant is either eligible to take part in a study or not. Eligibility questions may require a simple yes or no. In a study to explore the opinions of Sunday school teachers, an eligibility or qualifying question might be "Have you taught a Sunday school class in the past year?" Researchers also ask for biographical information from participants regarding age, years of experience and the like.

The commonly asked polling question "Is our country headed in the right direction?" is a splendid place to start our discussion. Please work through the exercise below. Then, read my comments.

Exercise: What's the Question? What are the Answers?

- What does it mean to say that a country is traveling in a **direction**? Do you think that this is how it works in real life?
- How would you rephrase the question in your own words?
- As asked, the question typically has only two choices: yes and no. What are the strengths and weaknesses of collecting data in this binary way?
- Are there other sensible options for answers besides yes and no? What is your rationale for giving respondents more than two options for responses?

The first question in the exercise worries about the fundamental metaphor underlying what seems to be a simple question. In what sense could an entire country be going in the right direction? A country might be rightly aligned for more than one reason. For instance, if the average income of households was improving, then the country could be said to be heading in the right economic direction. If the country recently enacted laws consistent with my moral compass, then I might think the country is headed in the right moral direction. Thus, if I value the lives of the unborn, I would conclude that passing a law that makes it more difficult for a pregnant woman to obtain an abortion is moving the country in the right direction. Of course, I might also think that the country is headed in the right moral direction because the federal government passed legislation to do any number of things, from making it more difficult to purchase a handgun to guaranteeing that the government would provide free clean needles to those who use injectable drugs. *Guns and Ammo* publishes a scorecard of state laws about gun rights each year. In 2020, the best state was Arizona (i.e., that state imposed the fewest restrictions on private gun owners) and the worst was Hawaii (Wood 2020). Why would the magazine track this information state by state? Because the laws of the various states vary widely. If I thought that the only issue that really matters to me is government policies to combat global climate change, no other factors would inform my opinion. I hope that you see that the "right direction" question might be construed in very different ways by different respondents. I also hope that you see that a reasonable person might think

that things are getting better in some senses but not others. If I care about economic wellbeing and the state of civil society, I might say that the country is moving in the right economic direction but the wrong direction in terms of the quality of our political discourse.

Are there better ways to ask this question? Almost certainly. A questionnaire might add the qualifying phrase like "all things considered, is the country heading in the right direction?" or "taking for granted that some things might be getting better and other things getting worse, is the country generally heading in the right direction?" Posing the question that way acknowledges complexity. Another way to rephrase the question would be to break it down into a series of discrete questions of interest to the researcher: Is the standard of living improving for most people? Has law enforcement gotten better or worse at treating people fairly? The way that a broad question is rephrased reveals the aspects of the question that the researcher is especially concerned about.

> **Thought Problem** Rewrite the question "Is the country heading in the right direction?" as three or more separate questions. What do your question choices reveal about your values and who you are (intersectionality)?

The classic question about a country's direction is consistent with the American political ethos in which there are two dominant parties. In many elections, the choices up and down the ballot are a choice between two candidates, a Democrat and a Republican. Functionally, not voting at all is irrelevant because the winner is the candidate that receives the most votes cast. (The great exception to this practice in the United States is presidential elections, which are decided by a constitutionally stipulated two-stage election involving the allocation of electoral votes among the states.)

There are several strengths of asking a forced-choice question and requiring an either/or answer. First, asking a question in this way forces people who like debate and nuance to come to a decision and express an opinion. Second, it is easy to keep track of data that is asked as yes-or-no questions. Third, often yes/no questions are needed to help the researcher make decisions. If a participant takes part in a focus group, for instance, a researcher may ask "Are you willing to be contacted about scheduling an interview on the same topic?" In cases like this one, "maybe" is not a helpful answer. At the same time, a binary forced choice may not be helpful to the researcher at all. In our example about the country's direction, I can imagine many reasons why participants would respond either yes or no, or to imagine that some yes responses are more enthusiastic than others. Pollsters wondering who will turn out to vote often want to gauge the level of enthusiasm for a candidate as well as the general preference one way or the other. Thus, simply noting yes-or-no responses only tells part of the story.

Because of the limitations of asking yes/no questions, it is common for researchers to offer a range of possible responses when asking survey questions. Such a range of answers is commonly called a Likert scale to recognize the contribution of psychologist Rensis Likert, who invented this approach (Likert 1932). For now, let's simply notice that the following sets of options provide more nuance and more choices than a simple yes/no:

- Three choices: yes; neither agree nor disagree; no
- Five choices: strongly agree; agree; neutral; disagree; strongly disagree

As a practical matter of data management, it is not more difficult to assign numbers to these options (from 1 to 3 or 1 to 5) and tally results than it is to keep track of answers made to yes and no in a binary set of answer options. A key reason for offering a range of options

rather than only two is to provide people the opportunity to be uncertain or express varying levels of enthusiasm. A choice such as "neither agree nor disagree" provides that option. Of course, sometimes participants simply do not have an opinion at all. Many response scales offer a "no opinion" option. To continue pondering options for answers to survey questions, work through the exercise below. There is more than one good set of answers.

Exercise: Questions and Answers Write a range of response choices for the questions below. In other words, write a list of possible answers that participants would pick from. Provide respondents at least three choices. Explain why you chose to phrase responses as you did.

- What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?
- How often do you pray?
- How do you feel about the US Supreme Court's ruling that made gay marriage legal throughout the USA?
- What are your top three ways to spend your free time?

A good set of answers for the first question might be: vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, and other. The reason? Based on no research, I happen to think that vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry are currently the most popular flavors of ice cream. Social scientists say that this kind of question produces nominal or categorical data: the response is simply a name of something. The same is true of questions like: "In which Canadian province were you born?" Or, "What color are your eyes?" The second question asks about the frequency of a behavior. A possible range of answers might be: several times a day; about once a day; a few times a week; less than once a week; rarely. These answers are arranged from the highest to lowest frequency. (Of course, you could also ask participants to respond by writing down a number such as "five times a day.") Because the responses here are numbers (or estimates of numbers), it is logical to say things like "Participant D reported that she prayed more often than Participant E." If your list of answers included "whenever the Spirit moves," a social scientist would want to ask a follow-up question: "In your experience, how often does the Spirit move you to pray?" The third question (about a particular ruling of a court) might require a range of responses written as levels of agreement or disagreement. For instance: strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree. Is my choice of "disagree" at the same level of disagreement if you chose "strongly disagree?" It is difficult to know. We will revisit this problem later in this chapter. Because it is difficult to know what to do with levels of agreement and disagreement, social scientists and educators frequently combine totals and write summary sentences like 'Thirty-five percent of those surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed; forty percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.'

The final question asks for multiple answers (three). Without knowing more about the persons who will be answering the questions, it would be difficult to provide a list of options. I might write one set of answers for a group of parents with young children (that list would include napping) and a different list for older persons who do not have children living with them. Notice that I simply asked for "the top three," without ranking. If I ask the question this way, I won't have a reliable way of knowing which was ranked first, second, and third by each participant. I might also ask respondents to pick three answers from a list and rank them in order of preference. Finally, I might provide no answer choices and trust participants to write down three answers.

Thought Problem What kind of data are asked for by the first question (one's favorite ice cream) and the last question (ways to spend free time)?

Best Practices for Short-answer Questions in Surveys

This section discusses some best practices for writing short-answer questions. The researcher should ask only one question at a time. Questions should be posed in ways that make sense to those who will answer them. The question should not contain hints about the preferred answer. Finally, the menu of possible answers should fit the question.

1. Ask one question at a time.

In everyday speech, we commonly pile up phrases that mean essentially the same thing. This habit does not serve well when it comes time to write questions for study participants. Consider the examples below.

- Are these sermons relevant to your spiritual and social life? Yes; No
- Do these sermons stir you to respond to God or neighbor? Yes; No

In both examples, a single sentence asks a compound question. In the first example, must sermons be relevant both to my spiritual and social life for me to choose the yes response? If some respondents choose no, the researcher doesn't know if the no applies to spiritual life or social life—or both. The meaning of the response isn't clear. The researcher should ask two separate questions, not one question with two parts. Similarly, the second question masks two questions. By using "or" as the conjunction, does the researcher intend for a respondent to feel comfortable choosing the yes choice if sermons only evoke responses to God? Only to one's neighbor? Again, the precise meaning of the response isn't clear. To ask only one question at a time, a novice researcher should thoroughly review questions for unintended instances of compound questions. To practice asking one question at a time, please complete the following exercise. Then, read my remarks below.

Exercise: One at a Time, Please Rewrite the following questions and answers so that only one thing is asked at a time. There is more than one way to rewrite these questions. Use the approach that makes sense to you.

- Do you support Soccertown Christian Church (SCC) with gifts of time, talent, and treasure? Yes; No
- Are you actively antiracist? Yes; No

The first question cries out to be divided into at least three questions: one each about time, talent, and treasure. When asked in a survey with no conversation, it is challenging to come up with a list of good options. For instance, is the question about supporting one's congregation with one's time a question about participation in a ministry? If so, the researcher might write the question and answer options like those below.

How do you participate in the ministries of SCC? Check all that apply.

☐ Read lessons or usher
☐ Staff the food pantry
☐ Serve on church committee
☐ Provide transportation to senior citizens

The way I rewrote this question still has elements of all-or-nothing. One either does or does not staff the food pantry, for instance. If the researcher wants to know how frequently someone remembers participating in a ministry, then the response scale should state options for frequency (ranging from occasionally to frequently or with more precise numeric measures).

The second question uses the ambiguous adverb "actively." If the questioner and respondents share a common understanding of what antiracist means (and this term is used differently by different persons), this question and answer set might helpfully be rewritten like this:

How do you express your commitment to anti-racism? Check all that apply. In the last year:

☐ I contributed money to the NAACP.
☐ I attended meetings of the civilian oversight board of the police department.
☐ I attended one or more protests at city hall.

A careful reader might ask: are the re-written questions worded in ways that do justice to the meaning of being *actively* antiracist? Perhaps not. The researcher could revise the answer scale to include more levels of activity. For instance, the question might ask "How many protests at city hall did you attend in the last year?" The respondent could simply write down a number. I hope that these exercises help you to understand that moving from one vague question with two answers to a more nuanced question with more options for answers quickly can generate dozens of possible subsidiary questions. In real life, the researcher must carefully choose which questions to ask, lest survey respondents stop answering because of weariness.

2. Ask questions in a language that connects with respondents.

Language that is appropriate and understandable in one context may not communicate well in other contexts. Depending on context, a *pattern* is a template for cutting out fabric or the series of steps and changes of direction that a wide receiver runs during a pass play in an American football game. What problems, if any, do you see in the language used in questions in the exercise below?

Exercise: The Wording of Questions

- What is your denominational affiliation?
- Please indicate your ability in theological reflection.
- Do you tithe?
- What is your religion? ☐ Catholic; ☐ Protestant; ☐ Jew; ☐ Muslim; ☐ other
- Have you served on a classis or vestry?

In each of these examples, words that make sense to the researcher may not connect with study participants. Consider the first example. Some Christians do not belong to denominations organized along the connectional lines of so-called “mainline” denominations, such as Presbyterians and Lutherans. Many Catholics do not consider the Catholic Church to be a “denomination” on par with Protestant churches. Certainly, official Catholic teaching privileges the Catholic Church over and against expressions of Protestant Christianity. Thus, the word “denomination” might not be a good choice in some studies because terms commonly used in some circles are esoteric or offensive in others. The second example uses a common expression thrown around by professors at seminaries. The problem is that the term “theological reflection” is used in many ways. Sometimes it means a formal approach to doing theology (Graham, Walton, Ward, and Stuerzenhofecker 2019). Sometimes it means the ability to notice that God is involved with our everyday lives. In a survey, it would be a good idea to provide a definition of this term. The third example uses a word found in the Bible, *tithe*, but which has received multiple interpretations over time. For centuries in Europe, a tithe was a mandatory gift in kind collected by bishops and abbots. Currently, tithe and tithing are sometimes used to describe any financial gift to support a congregation. Sometimes a tithe means giving a monetary gift of ten percent of one’s income.

The fourth example (asking about one’s religion) shows how commonly used sociological categories change over time. In the 1950s, it was common for Catholics and Protestants to talk about each other as if there was a religion called Protestantism that had very little to do with another religion, Catholicism. In more recent use, because of the success of the ecumenical movement, Catholicism and Protestantism might be branches of the religion called Christianity. In writing questions for a survey that would be answered by adherents of many different religions, it might be more hospitable and communicate better to reword the question as “What is your religious affiliation?” and let respondents write what they wish. If it is important to list possibilities, it is a good practice to think about the full range of possible responses so that no religious group becomes the choice that no researcher could imagine (other). The final question uses terms for the leadership council of a congregation in some Reformed and Episcopal churches, respectively. As a best practice, researchers should know the terminology preferred by those who will take part in a study and write questions accordingly. When researchers create questions that participants do not understand, it becomes highly likely that participants will guess at answers or skip questions. In either case, the researcher has lost data points important to her study. If a researcher needs to use technical language in a short-answer question, it is helpful to provide a working definition. It is always helpful to ask a colleague to review draft survey questions.

> **Thought Problem** Think of some examples of words or phrases related to religious experiences and practices that might be clear to a believer in your tradition, but which might be misunderstood by outsiders. How might you re-word survey questions about religious experience and practices to communicate better with study participants from a variety of religious backgrounds?

3. Ask questions without hinting at desirable responses.

Avoid the temptation of putting breadcrumbs into questions that ultimately lead participants to the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow—the answer that I, the researcher, want to hear. Give participants the freedom to express their own viewpoints. Consider the examples below. How does the wording suggest right or wrong answers?

Exercise: Biased Questions Rewrite these questions and answer options to minimize hinting.

- Do you go to Mass faithfully? ☐ Yes; ☐ No
- Should senators introduce legislation that is consistent with Jesus's way of justice and love? ☐ Yes; ☐ No
- Which aspects of my doctoral project were highly effective? Choose two from this list: number of retreats; my leadership of small groups; opportunities to share in small groups; Bible studies; worship.

The first question strongly suggests that it is a good thing to go to Mass and that one either does or does not "faithfully" participate. Is the question about how often someone participates? If so, a less tendentious form of the question and answers might be:

How often do you take part in Mass?

☐ almost every day
☐ weekly
☐ two or three times per month
☐ once a month or less

The range of responses allows a participant to find the answer that most closely fits his attendance pattern without an implied rebuke about his or her "faithfulness." A researcher can ask this question in a neutral form and still, when interpreting his data later, make theological or pastoral judgments about levels of mass attendance. Of course, the researcher needs to make sure that the term "Mass" is part of the shared vocabulary between herself and survey participants. If not, she should define the term or replace it with another word.

The second question appears to be written by someone who believes that there is a set of behaviors and policies about "justice and love" of which Jesus approves more than others. Careful readers get bonus points for noticing the compound element in the question (perhaps justice and love are different notions in some important senses). Without further information, it is unclear if the larger purpose for asking this question is to get at opinions about how elected leaders ought to relate their Christian beliefs to public policy, or if the questioner wants to know about the participant's agreement with specific pieces of legislation that the researcher thinks are consistent with what Jesus approves. Possible rewrites of the question might be:

A: Should senators introduce legislation that is consistent with their Christian beliefs about justice?

☐ yes
☐ no
☐ no opinion

B: How important to you is it for senators to introduce legislation that is consistent with Christian beliefs about justice?

☐ very important
☐ important
☐ unimportant
☐ very unimportant

Finally, variations of the third question are likely to appear as Doctor of Ministry students seek to evaluate the effectiveness of their final doctoral projects. The deficiency in this question is the assumption that at least two dimensions of the project were, in fact, "highly effective." The wording of the question does not give respondents the freedom to choose from a full range of plausible responses. Taking seriously the five hypothetical components of the project, the exercise question is best recast as five *separate* questions utilizing the same response scale, as shown in the table below.

Table 6.1 — Asking One Question at a Time, Full Range of Response Options

Please rate the effectiveness of these components of my doctoral project. Select the response for each component which most closely matches your opinion. Mark an X to indicate your choice.

	Very effective	**Moderately effective**	**Somewhat effective**	**Not effective**
Number of retreats				
My leadership of small groups				
Opportunities to share in small groups				
Bible studies				
Worship				

4. Ask questions in a manner that moves the study forward.

When composing survey questions, researchers need to consider the kind of responses that will best help them further the purposes of the study. Open-ended questions (i.e., questions that could reasonably provoke answers of several sentences or paragraphs) may provoke responses that go in directions unforeseen by the researcher and open layers of complexity about the phenomenon being studied. If the researcher hopes that responses to the survey broaden possibilities for exploration later in the study, then asking questions so that respondents write sentences in response is appropriate. Asking respondents to pick one choice from a set menu may not be as helpful. Consider the following ways of asking churchgoers why they attend services. Assume that this question is part of a study focused on the themes that regular church attenders voice regarding Sunday worship services. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

Open and Closed Questions

Why do you participate in Sunday worship services?

What aspects of Sunday worship services keep you coming back? Choose all that apply.

☐ Preaching
☐ Taking communion
☐ Corporate singing
☐ Being with my friends
☐ Worshipping God

The open-ended question may evoke a wide variety of responses, many more than the five options listed in the second (closed) question. The open form of the question is so broad (why?) that some respondents might have difficulty landing on a reason or reasons. The second form of the question is more tangible because it gives options. Of course, other possible motivations might not be in the list of choices (habit, bringing my aged parent to church, etc.). Thus, there are tradeoffs to asking one type of question versus another type of question in a survey. The closed form of a question might not include a broad enough menu of options to honor the complexity of human experience. An open-ended question may not give enough handles for some respondents to identify a thoughtful answer. If you know how responses to questions will move your data collection forward, you can ask short-answer questions with a set of options frequently and open-ended questions when necessary.

> **Thought Experiment: Improving a Menu of Responses** How might you make the question about worship services (above) better? Hint: a full range of options might be unmanageable. How can you overcome that problem?

5. Ask questions about relative preferences clearly.

Sometimes a researcher wants to learn about the relative importance of items on a list. A researcher using a liberationist approach, for instance, might want to know what local problems are most vexing from the point of view of members of her congregation. A DMin student using a project approach might want to ask which ministry opportunities resonate the most with members of a congregation. In these cases, it is appropriate to ask participants to state their preferences in ranked order. For instance, a researcher might ask about the most vexing problems in a community like this:

Community Problems

Please express your opinion about the most pressing problems in our community. Rank each item on the list 1 through 4, (1= most pressing, 4= least pressing). Use each rating only once.

Access to healthy food ____

Neighborhood crime _____

Condition of roads _____

Connectivity to the internet _____

When using this approach, the challenge for the researcher is to provide an adequate list of response options. She doesn't want to miss any plausible options. Notice also that asking respondents to rank the choices in order forces a decision in the way that asking them to pick their top two choices does not.

To summarize this section: Ask one question at a time. Use intelligible language in questions. Do not hint at desirable responses in how questions are posed. Write questions in ways that help the researcher make efficient progress in data collection. Finally, be clear when asking participants to rank preferences in order.

Asking Questions Online

Survey questions used to be asked face to face or via telephone. Nowadays, however, researchers can deploy questionnaires broadly using online tools. The list below shows some of the many survey tools available at no or low cost to researchers. Each of them enables researchers to create surveys and deploy them by sending a link to potential participants. These tools allow researchers to input their survey questions into a template. Before sending out the survey, researchers can see how the questions will display on computers and phones. All of the characteristics of a good survey question outlined in this chapter apply to survey questions that you ask online.

Online tools also simplify the compilation of responses and generate pre-programmed reports. I will have much more to say about data analysis in chapter 8.

Free or Low-cost Online Survey Tools

- SurveyMonkey (*surveymonkey.com*)
- Google Forms (available from *Google.com*)
- SoGoSurvey (*experience.sogosurvey.com*)
- Typeform (*www.typeform.com*)

Regardless of whether a researcher is asking survey questions online or in a face-to-face setting, the same best practices for clarity apply.

Survey Questions in the Arc of Research Design and Data Collection

Survey questions can serve distinct functions depending on when they fall in the research sequence. A researcher might, for example, want to determine which aspects of a topic are considered especially important. She might send out an online survey early in her study to respondents to rank the importance of several topics or pick the most important. After tabulating responses, she might then conduct focus groups or interviews on the aspects of her topic that survey respondents identified.

How might this work in practice? The Graduating Student Questionnaire of the Association of Theological Schools asks graduating students in their final year of seminary to choose the three most important influences on their educational experience from a list of eleven choices (Association of Theological Schools 2020). The four most important, according to MDiv graduates, are listed in the table below.

Table 6.2 — Most Important Influences on Educational Experience (MDiv graduates, 2020)

Influence	Number	Percentage
Experiences in ministry	1,191	19.8
Interactions with students	992	16.5
Personal life experiences	804	13.4
Introduction to different perspectives	762	12.7
	3,749	62.4

Source: Graduating Student Questionnaire, All Schools Results 2019-2020, Table 17

Notice that these four influences account for more than three out of five of all responses. A researcher wanting to understand why graduates found these responses made such an impact could conduct interviews with graduates on any of these topics. In this case, a survey conducted by a reputable organization provides background data that informs the significance of a possible study.

As another example, a researcher might wish to study the challenges in ministry faced by pastors in her own tradition in her region. She might write two research questions (RQs):

> **RQ 1.** What ministry challenges do pastors in my tradition state are the most important?
>
> **RQ 2.** How do study participants describe their experience with the three most important ministry challenges that their colleagues identified?

A researcher uses survey questions as phase one of a two-part study, perhaps distributed using an online tool. The specific responses to phase one shape what happens in the second phase of data collection, perhaps via face-to-face interviews. On the other hand, a researcher might ask survey questions after surfacing key themes via some other means (e.g., focus group), then deploy a questionnaire to gather more data. I used this approach in my study of the lifeworlds of ministers serving congregations (Lincoln 2020). After conducting five focus groups of seminary graduates, I used SurveyMonkey to ask more than 200 graduates about, among other things, how the themes identified by the focus groups interacted with each other. Time and human frailty would have made it impossible for me to gather that much data using individual interviews.

> **Thought Problem** What is the relationship to research questions and data collection techniques? How does the time available for the researcher to collect data affect the choice of data collection techniques?

Descriptive Statistics

As discussed above, a qualitative researcher may use survey questions as a key technique in data collection. Even in cases when a researcher uses ethnography, interviewing, or focus groups as the primary ways to collect data, she should also collect information about study participants via survey questions. It is important to count and tabulate these responses because they will form a record of precisely who participated in the study. Just as importantly, such data summaries help the researcher to analyze data and interpret them. For instance, if my analysis of data seems to suggest that converts to the Catholic Church held stronger views on certain topics than lifelong Catholics, I would be helpless to pursue this analytical hunch if I did not know how many participants in my study were converts and how many were lifelong Catholics. I would also need to manage my data well enough so that I could follow the data trail from participant comments back to characteristics of specific participants. Social scientists need numerical summaries of some data in any study. Descriptive statistics provide a concise account of them. For instance, when I write that "five men and seven women took part in my study," I have reported descriptive statistics about study participants. Inferential statistics, by contrast, wants to argue that because of the results of a study with a smaller group of participants (a random sample) I have mathematical license to extrapolate those results to larger groups. Qualitative researchers do not use random sampling and do not use inferential statistics.

This section provides my advice to novice researchers about summarizing data about participants and other survey question data. Readers who are interested in more detailed discussions may consult a broad variety of books about statistics (Minimum, Clarke, and Coladarci 1999; Gravetter and Wallnau 2016). If you are tempted to skip this section because it might trigger your math anxiety, fear not. I focus here on three key aspects of descriptive statistics: data types, counting, and measures of central tendency.

Data Types

Key classes of data are nominal, ordinal, and ratio. It is important to understand the differences between classes because the researcher cannot perform the same kinds of mathematical operations on all of them.

Nominal Data. When you ask someone where they were born or what their favorite flavor of ice cream is, you are asking a question that is answered with nominal (or categorical) data. You may tally up responses to nominal data, but that is about it. You cannot say that the "average" response to a question about ice cream flavors was vanilla, but you can say that it was the most popular.

Ordinal Data. When you ask someone to rank preferences in order or use a Likert scale, you are authorized to add up totals, like nominal data, and also to make statements about a value being more than or less than. In the ancient Olympics, it was possible to know who finished a race in first, second, and third places even without the use of stop watches to measure time.

Ratio Data. When you ask me about my weight or how many years of formal education I have had, you are asking me to respond with a number relative to a meaningful zero. These data are called ratio data. Ratio data can be manipulated in several ways, including the computing of averages and statements like "My first granddaughter is four years older than my second granddaughter." In some cases, this level of precision is far more helpful than saying something like "Fiona was born first, Alice second, and Evelyn third."

Researchers need to know the type of data that they are using so that they avoid saying silly things like "the average place of birth for study participants was Winnipeg." Because one's place of birth is an instance of nominal or categorical data, averages have nothing to do with it. Winnipeg isn't the average of Montreal and Vancouver simply because it is roughly halfway between them on a map.

Thought Problem Determine which data type applies to each of the following data points:

- Year in which a priest was ordained
- Most-preferred and least-preferred subjects in seminary
- List of textbooks (arranged by author's surname) for a course in practical theology
- Favorite Bible verse

Count Completely, Report Concisely

As a matter of accuracy and ethics, researchers need to report data that can be counted completely and concisely. In the examples that follow, I will use a set of hypothetical data about study participants. Let's imagine a study compares the ministry experiences of Catholic priests and Lutheran pastors who live and work in the same tri-county area. The researcher conducted two focus groups, one for each set of clergy. The number of priests that participated was nine (n=9). The number of pastors that participated was fifteen (n=15).

The researcher asked all study participants to report how many years of full-time experience in ministry after ordination each had. She asked them to write down a number—the number of years. To think about how to report these numerical data completely and concisely, please work through the exercise below. Then read my comments.

Exercise: Reporting on Years of Pastoral Experience How would you summarize these numerical results?

- Study participants who were Catholic priests wrote down the following years of experience: 18, 5, 17, 38, 37, 29, 9, 18, 18
- Study participants who were Lutheran pastors reported: 2, 35, 25, 22, 38, 15, 9, 37, 27, 20, 34, 3, 28, 8

Here is how I would summarize these data. Because this study compares two groups, I would not combine all of these results into one list for computational purposes. I also note that all nine priests provided data; data from one Lutheran minister is missing.

For each group, I would report the range. The range shows the extent of responses from lowest to highest. Thus, the range of years of experience for priests is 5–38 years. The range for the Lutherans is 2–38 years. Note that the range only gives the outer limits of the set of numbers; it tells you nothing about the frequency of responses. Because these data are numbers of years (i.e., a measurement of quantity), I could decide to report the average numbers of experience for each group. For the priests in the study, the average is 21 years. (Add up

all of the numbers and divide by 9.) For the Lutherans, the average is 21.6. (Add up all the numbers and divide by 14).

I might also choose to report the median number of years of experience for each group. The median reports the value of the middle case once all data have been arranged from lowest to highest. For the priests, the median is 18 years; for the pastors it is 23.5. Notice that, in our example, there is a difference between the median years of experience of five and a half years even though the difference between the average years of ministerial experience between the groups is less than a year.

Thought Problem Years of experience is what kind of data (nominal, ordinal, ratio)?

Measures of Central Tendency

In descriptive statistics, it is good practice to report one or more statistics that indicate something about what "most" of the data say. The three standard ***measures of central tendency*** are the mean, the median, and the mode. These measures cannot be applied to nominal or ordinal data but should be applied to ratio data (numbers of years, income, etc.).

The *mean* is the average. It is computed by adding up the numeric values of all the numbers and dividing by the number of responses.

The *median* is the middle case once the numbers are arranged in order from lowest to highest. Using the data about priests from our example, the numbers are put in order thus: 5, 9, 17, 18, 18, 18, 29, 37, 38. There are nine numbers. The value of the 5th case (the one in the middle) is 18, so that is the median.

Once arranged in order, the Lutheran data look like this: 2, 3, 8, 9, 15, 20, 22, 25, 27, 28, 34, 35, 37, 38. Because there are fourteen cases, the median is computed as the average of the values of the 7th and 8th cases. Thus, the median is 23.5.

The *mode* is the most common value in a set of numbers. Thus, for the priests, the mode is 18 (3 out of 9 responses). Notice that there is no mode for the Lutheran data; the frequency of each response was the same—one.

It is a common trope to say that statistics lie or liars use statistics to deceive us. According to arithmetic, each computed measure of central tendency is accurate. Each measure reveals and conceals something about the set of data that it reports on. In these data, the average number of years served by a Catholic priest is 21, even though the median is 18 and the mode is 18. Why? The average is influenced by every single response in the set of numbers. The presence of high numbers (29, 37, and 38) pushes the average up. The median is not influenced by the values at either end of the distribution.

The average number of years served by a Lutheran pastor is 21.6. The median value is 23.5, and there is no mode. Simply by knowing the average or the median, you would not know that four out of 14 Lutherans had fewer than 10 years of ministerial experience.

Frequently, researchers should report the median and not the average in reports. If I know that the median number of years of experience for priests in this study is 18, then I know (by definition) that half of the group has more than 18 years of experience and half have fewer. If I only know the average, I don't know anything about the distribution of values. For instance, the following sets of numbers have the same average, 20:

- 1, 1, 5, 21, 72 (wide range!)
- 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 (tight range)
- 5, 10, 15, 25, 45

When it is important to know the distribution of responses, I suggest reporting both the range and the median. Another way to group this kind of data is to use clusters. For instance, I might report the data in our hypothetical example like this:

> The range of years of experience for priests in my study was 5–38 years. One third of priests reported 5–17 years of pastoral experience; one third reported 18 years; and one third reported 29 or more years of experience.
>
> For Lutherans, the range of years of experience was between 2 and 38 years. Half reported between 9 and 28 years of experience.

Because the data about priests fell nearly into thirds, it is appropriate to report them this way. This kind of summary clearly shows the distribution of responses with more detail than reporting only the range. Do not lose track of the range for a set of values. The range lists the lower and upper limits of one set of data. The range shows the breadth of responses; measures of central tendency show the most common responses. It is important to share both the range and one or more measures of central tendency with readers in reports for the same reason that it is important to count all valid votes in an election—accuracy.

Thought Problem What is at stake ethically in how you tabulate your data?

Accuracy in Summations of Statistics

Before ending this chapter, let's consider some more hypothetical data from our study of Catholic and Lutheran clergy. The researcher asked participants "What seminary did you receive your MDiv degree from?" Work through the exercise below, then read my comments.

Exercise: Summarizing Data about Educational Background How could you summarize the data below to communicate clearly to readers of a research study?

- Catholics: 7 attended Diocese of Middle City Seminary; 1 attended St. John's Seminary (Camarillo CA); 1 attended Notre Dame Seminary (New Orleans)
- Lutherans: 5 attended Middle City Lutheran Seminary; 6 attended Wartburg Seminary; 3 attended Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

Counts of data about the names of schools or places are nominal or categorical data. As such, a researcher can report frequencies (as in the exercise above). The researcher can also report the most common answer (the mode). However, it isn't appropriate to say, "The average priest in my study attended Diocese of Middle City Seminary" or "The average Lutheran in my study attended Wartburg Seminary." Averages apply to quantities like years of experience or more or fewer grams of yeast. If more than half of participants all attended one seminary, it is appropriate to say, for instance, "A typical priest in my study attended Diocese of Middle City Seminary."

Conclusion

This chapter poked at the idea of simple questions with simple answers. When it comes to asking study participants survey questions—i.e., questions asked without the possibility of interaction between the questioner and the respondent—even simple questions beget subsidiary questions with more nuance. As we have seen, the researcher needs to ask questions in ways that enable the respondent to make a sensible answer. The researcher should therefore ask one question at a time and avoid jargon. A question should not contain within itself the seeds of a correct or preferred answer. When presenting respondents with a list of options, the options should include the full range of possibilities.

This chapter also provided a brief primer on descriptive statistics. Qualitative research reports commonly include statistical summaries about the characteristics of study participants and answers to survey questions. By understanding the difference between nominal, ordinal, and ratio data types, the researcher can accurately and succinctly report characteristics of study participants.

CHAPTER 6: KEY POINTS

- » A survey question is a request for information posed in a context where the researcher does not ask follow-up questions in real time.
- » Eligibility questions are requests for information used by the researcher to determine if an individual qualifies to be part of a study.
- » A forced-choice question asks the respondent to choose one and only one response from a menu of options.
- » A Likert scale lists a range of answers along a continuum from which the respondent chooses one.
- » When writing short-answer questions, the researcher should:
    - ◊ ask one question at a time.
    - ◊ use language that connects with respondents.
    - ◊ ask questions without hinting at desirable responses.
    - ◊ ask questions in a way that serves the researcher's purposes.
- » Open-ended questions give respondents more freedom than forced-choice questions.
- » Online tools benefit researchers by extending their reach to larger pools of participants.
- » Survey questions may be used early in the research process to identify or focus a topic.
- » Survey questions may be used later in the data collection process to test the frequency of themes discovered by interviewing smaller numbers of participants.
- » Researchers need to summarize descriptive statistics about study participants, recognizing the difference between nominal, ordinal, and ratio data.

CHAPTER 7

Observation and Mixed Methods

> *Humans have tremendous difficulty making accurate observations. Different people will perceive the same event differently; they apply their own interpretations to what they see. One's perception or recollection of an event, although it seems accurate, may well be faulty. This fact creates problems in science, because science requires objective observation.*
>
> – Alan J. Beauchamp (2019), psychologist

> *To make explicit the meaning, the significance, of everyday practices in any kind of truly explanatory manner requires going beneath the surface to those messy spaces of our lives where we commonly don't explain why we do what we do.*
>
> – Ellen J. Pader (2006, 174), anthropologist

I have some red/green color blindness. I can confidently tell the difference between a green traffic light and a red one, but my perceptual limitation causes me constantly to ask my spouse what color things are, especially things that look green or blue to me. Scientists who study the perception of color have long known that, by manipulating light conditions, a square that "really" is blue can be made to appear as other colors. Beauchamp's worries about the limitations of observation are rooted in the traditional Western "scientific" paradigm, sometimes called logical positivism. In this paradigm, perceptions need to be put to the test. Planet earth isn't flat, for instance, despite appearances. Baseball fans, too, have been given to wonder out loud why individuals with such poor eyesight (viz. umpires) are paid to call balls and strikes. To put it another way, untutored observation is a blunt tool for data collection. And yet, skilled observation is a powerful tool of regular people, scientists, and pastors. Without the benefit of machines, my healthcare provider pokes and prods me and draws conclusions about my state of health. (He does supplement this hands-on exam with lab work.) Within the social sciences, anthropologists earn their daily bread and explain the workings of culture through a suite of methods called ethnography, chief among which is participant observation—a technique in which the skilled outsider observes the everyday practices of a social group, wonders why they engage in those activities, asks questions, watches some more, and eventually draws conclusions as to why people do what we do. Within the Christian community, pastors are trained to be empathetic observers of collections of believers in self-selecting units commonly called congregations or parishes. Part of

what makes a "good" pastor good is that she can observe the corporate life of her congregation and make pastoral sense of it. Pastors do hide in a duck blind and observe congregants from afar; they are actively involved in the lives of their flocks. Unlike a "scientific" experiment conducted in artificial conditions, observation captures us being messy ourselves. Ethnographic methods provide "the best possible chance to understand the participant in their own setting" (Swinton and Mowatt 2006, 168). Thus, observation is an important tool for qualitative researchers and practical theologians.

This chapter outlines procedures for collecting observational data, giving attention to the ethical issues pertinent to prolonged contact with study participants. Then the chapter contrasts full-scale "ethnography" with more modest uses of observation that are feasible for most ministry students. The chapter closes or concludes with a discussion of other techniques used to collect data in qualitative research studies. Because these techniques are often used alongside interviewing, or because the "method" uses several data gathering techniques, this set of tools is frequently called a mixed-methods approach to data collection. Researchers using a project approach need to build an evaluative process into the design of the study. Therefore, evaluation will be discussed in detail at the end of this chapter.

Observation as a Data Collection Technique

Before proceeding, please complete the following exercise. Write down your ideas before reading my comments.

> **Exercise: Observation and Memory** Think about events that you were part of and which you remember differently from others who were there. What is going on? To what extent do you trust your memory? What are possible aids to remembering well?

Years ago, my wife and I were both deposed by lawyers as part of sorting out insurance claims after a fire in the apartment building in which we lived. No one was injured, but almost everyone lost some property. On a cold day in January more than three years after the fire, lawyers asked both of us a series of questions. Sometimes we were each asked the exact same question. I noted at the time that our descriptions of some of the items in our apartment differed. For instance, I said that the computer monitor was white; my wife said it was cream-colored. Thankfully, no one pounced on these discrepancies. One event, two observers, and the passage of three years of time produced parallel, but not entirely congruent, memories. Perhaps you thought about being a witness to a car accident or a disagreement between co-workers as you were completing the above exercise. Two people viewing the same event see it through their own eyes. Their literal points of view are not the same. Because of human biology, memories change over time. The testimony of eyewitnesses is qualitatively different from the images captured by security cameras. To make observations (and the retrieval of observation) more helpful, qualitative researchers conduct observations in disciplined ways and document their observations as soon as possible. Writing down observations is a tremendous aid to memory.

What is Observation?

The suite of tools that researchers use to collect data from study participants by observing and being part of a social community was systematized by anthropologists and given the name of **ethnography**. In this context, ethnography refers both to the study of the culture of a bounded group of people (in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the people being studied tended not to live in Europe or North America) and to a set of techniques for learning about that culture. Unhelpfully, the written report interpreting the culture is also called an ethnography. Chief among the data gathering techniques of ethnography is **participant observation**. In the classic approach, I (the intrepid anthropologist) leave my home and travel to where my people (i.e., the social group that I will study) live. I may need to learn a new language, as well. I live among my people for at least a year. I do not hide the fact that I am an anthropologist. I not only hang around the edges of things but take part in cultural activities when appropriate. If everybody is eating seal, I eat seal. If everyone in the community gets malaria, I probably get malaria, too. If women and men are not to mingle, I honor that practice, although I may appeal to the leaders of the community for special permission to observe activities that might not be open to me because of my sex or gender. After all, I am a scientist and expect not to be treated exactly like everybody else. Although many in the community might find me a useless person, I am busy all of the time, because I not only hang out and badger people with questions, but I also write down my descriptions, musings, and tentative conclusions about what is happening in this culture. I do all these things, as one famous anthropologist put it (in sexist language): "to grasp the native's point of view, *his* relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world" (Malinowski 1922, 25, italics in original).

My description of the work of an anthropologist may sound romantic or exhausting or both. Before we proceed, please think about the questions in the exercise below. Write down your thoughts before reading my comments. Bring your background knowledge and imagination into the exercise

Exercise

- What might be the guiding research question for a study described in the previous paragraph?
- As a participant observer, can I know in advance what I should pay special attention to?
- What kind of events should a participant observer make sure to be part of in a community that is unfamiliar to the researcher?

The guiding research question for an ethnographic study might be phrased as "What is the culture of [my group of interest] like?" Culture, despite its contested meanings (Jahoda 2012), refers to the way of life for a group. That way of life involves specific behaviors and knowledge. It also involves the physical world as experienced by a group, whether the world is human-built or the natural world. For instance, where I grew up, people spend a lot of time watching, practicing, and arguing about a game played on a sheet of ice with sticks and a puck. I had enough cultural knowledge to know that hockey was important and that you should keep your stick on the ice. Where I live now, people are passionate about a different game played on a well-manicured field with an oddly shaped leather ball. I have enough cultural knowledge about football and Texas to know that "Friday night lights" means high

school football games. I also do not call a football field a rink. As the study of a culture, ethnography sets itself a very large task. Because culture encompasses everything that I do (I am using a ThinkPad laptop to write this paragraph, not a stylus for incising cuneiform, nor a quill pen for writing on paper) and how I am understood by others in my primary social groups (I am a librarian at a Protestant seminary; I am not a vassal of the king of Wessex), the participant observer seems, in principle, to be required to attend to everything.

The budding ethnographer needs to ride off in all directions for fear of missing out on the most important events for her group of interest. If the group has something called "religion" or gods, the ethnographer should attend religious events. If the group's main economic activity is raising grain or fishing, no doubt the participant observer needs to learn a lot of new information about how farming or fishing works. In the ethnographic approach, the researcher may have a general idea about some dimensions of group life to pay attention to. Because she wants to get at what it is like for members of her group of interest in relation to their own particular lives, realizing their own vision of their world, the ethnographic researcher needs to begin a study with as much sponge-like openness as she can muster.

Because it is impossible for a participant observer to pay attention to everything in the culture being studied, ethnography has developed a series of procedures to focus researcher attention. In Spradley's (1980/2016) model, the researcher moves from descriptive observation (the broadest level) to focused observations and finally to selective observations. The decision to move from the broadest level of observation to more focused observations depends on what the ethnographer has discovered. To put it another way, because the researcher notices something that is particularly intriguing in broad observations, she decides to narrow her gaze to a more focused aspect of culture. Before proceeding, think through or (better yet) engage in the following observational exercise.

Exercise: General Observation

- Choose a public space that you frequent (a grocery store, coffee shop, etc.). Spend two hours there hanging out in your mind or in real life. Intentionally observe what is going on. Afterwards, write down notes. Describe what you observed (saw, heard, smelled, felt). Note your reactions and questions.
- Choose an event or public space that is outside of your everyday routine (perhaps a concert of the kind of music that you don't care for or a speech by a politician whose views differ from yours). Intentionally observe what is going on there in your mind or in real life. Afterwards, write down notes. Describe what you observed (saw, heard, smelled, felt). Note your reactions and questions.

I have done both kinds of observations. I recall a graduate school assignment very much like the first example in the exercise. I spent a couple of hours in a large bookstore. I observed a lot of things happening that had very little to do with buying books: business meetings, students doing their homework, and staff discussing their plans for the upcoming weekend. There were also people looking at books, reading books on comfy chairs (a few people were taking naps), and buying books. Because a bookstore was familiar territory to me, I was not self-conscious about moving through the space. As I recall, I even bought something. Because I was being intentional in my observation, I felt under pressure to soak up as much as I could. I felt that there was simply too much to pay attention to.

The second kind of observation (a visit to an unfamiliar setting), in my experience, leads to even more questions in the mind of the researcher/observer. For instance, I visited a small gun show in a neighboring city in Texas. Because certain kinds of gun purchases that hap-

pen at gun shows are exempt from the usual rules, gun shows capture the attention of the popular media in the United States from time to time. Before I went to the show, I thought about what to wear so that I would blend in. I bought a cup of bad coffee at the concession stand and wandered around booth after booth of guns, knives, Donald Trump-themed merchandise, and the odd beef jerky vendor. I overheard vendors talking about the gun show circuit and "the regulars" who attended multiple shows. I saw only one or two people actually buying a gun from a dealer. Even though I was doing, more or less, what everybody else was, I felt out of place. (I had guessed right about my wardrobe. Many of us were wearing jeans and flannel shirts.) The great moment of irony during my visit to the gun show was walking through the foyer from the parking lot to the exhibit hall. On one side was a table where you could join the National Rifle Association. On the other side were armed law enforcement officers (wearing protective vests) making sure that no one brought a loaded gun inside. My observation confirmed some of my assumptions about what happens at a gun show, but not all of them. They seemed like a poor way for vendors to earn a living.

> **Thought Problem** What problems did you encounter as a participant observer completing the previous exercise? To what extent do you recognize them as problems because of your role as a researcher (collecting data) as opposed to being a person simply hanging out in a public space?

How can the novice ethnographer make intentional observations in the face of a barrage of stimuli in a new research setting? It is helpful to follow an observational protocol. Just as an interviewing protocol sets boundaries for a qualitative research interviewer when conducting research interviews, an observational protocol points to specific facets of an event under intentional observation by the participant observer.

In his classic guide to participant observation, Spradley (1980/2016, 78) lists nine dimensions of every social situation:

- **Space.** The physical place or places.
- **Actor.** The people involved.
- **Activity.** A set of related acts that people do.
- **Object.** The physical things that are present.
- **Act.** Single actions that people do,
- **Event.** A set of related activities that people carry out.
- **Time.** The sequencing of actions that takes place.
- **Goal.** The things people are trying to accomplish.
- **Feeling.** The emotions felt and expressed.

Spradley describes the number of questions relevant to any observation as "almost limitless" (80) and, to drive the point home to novice researchers, created a matrix of 91 descriptive questions pertinent to initial observations. For instance, regarding the actors (people involved in the event), he includes questions about how the actors use objects, where in space the actors are located during the event, and how various actors are related to the goals of the event (82–3). Even if we assume that the researcher adopts a passive level of participa-

tion while making observations (i.e., all that she is doing is trying to attend to the actions of others), it would require stupefying persistence and a photographic memory to document observations about every element in Spradley's list in an observation.

In practice, ethnographers build up a set of observations over time. For instance, by observing worship for seven Sundays in a row at Yourtown Community Church, the observer has multiple opportunities to notice who comes to services (in terms of ages of worshippers, women and men, those who wear jeans and those who are dressed up) and what the main elements of the worship service are (singing, prayers, sermons, taking up an offering, etc.). Only after the researcher has figured these things out may her attentional resources be directed to notice who clusters with whom during post-service refreshments or the pastor's habit of going out of his way to greet visitors. Only with repeated observation might the researcher come to a conclusion grounded in observation that Yourtown's worship has, for at least some worshippers, goals besides the public worship of God. Multiple observations might also be necessary for the researcher to conclude that this church has an implicit theology that is more than the sum of the words read, proclaimed, and sung during the service.

Before discussing writing field notes (the ethnographic term for documenting the researcher's observations) and more refined observations, we should revisit the importance of research questions in guiding observation. Please complete the exercise below.

> **Exercise: Research Questions and Ethnographic Observation** In Hispanic (Latinx) communities, a *quinceañera* is a celebration for a young woman on her fifteenth birthday. Imagine that you wish to study *quinceañeras* and have decided to use observation as one of your data gathering techniques. Study participants are girls who have celebrated their *quinceañeras* in the past three years and members of their families. Consider two possible research questions (RQs) for a study of such celebrations. How would the research questions shape your observational protocol? Why?
>
> - RQ 1: How do study participants understand the place of *quinceañera* celebrations in their families and communities?
> - RQ 2: How do study participants understand the religious dimensions of *quinceañera* celebrations?

The first research question is posed broadly. I would imagine that an observational protocol would need to attend to the breadth of persons attending the celebration ("families and communities") and, at least initially, would ask the observer to attend to each of Spradley's dimensions. By contrast, the second research question is more tightly focused. An observational protocol might be created that focuses on the presence or absence of religious leaders and the use of explicitly religious actions (e.g., prayer) during the event. Regardless of which research questions govern the study, the researcher would need to attend several celebrations to begin to gain an understanding of the textures and meanings of *quinceañeras*.

Using Field Notes

When a qualitative interviewer conducts interviews, there is a distinctive arc of planning what to ask (an interview protocol), the interview itself (hopefully, recorded), the transcription of the interview (thoughtfully analyzing what was said), and, finally, interpretation of what participants meant. In practice, time elapses between the conduct of interviews and their transcription. The act of recording the interview captures the words (if not the distinctive gestures and range of vocal qualities) of study participants. In ethnography, the

researcher must make observations of activities and document them—somehow! In the process, the researcher is aware that she is part of the action. Writing an ethnographic field note is the act of "an observer/researcher [who] sits down and turns a piece of *her lived experience* [my emphasis] into a bit of written text" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011, xiii). In our discussion of interviewing in chapter 5, we noted that the researcher wants to get at the lived experience of study participants. The italicized text in the previous quotation reminds us that the researcher employing ethnography is very much part of the action. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw think that the field notes record something that happened to the researcher. While this event involves study participants, the researcher's fingerprints are always found on the scene. Participant observation involves viewing complex social interactions (by the use of eyesight), overhearing conversations, and asking questions. Therefore, writing field notes is a complex activity.

In the ethnographic approach to gathering data, field notes are written records that fulfill several functions. First, field notes include a description of an encounter between the researcher and study participants. The kind of encounters range from snatches of overheard conversation to being part of a long ceremony (e.g., a funeral). Field notes remind the researcher what happened in detail. Second, field notes are a way of noting puzzlement, wonder, or other responses that the researcher experienced while being a participant/observer. In other words, field notes are a way for the researcher to be reflexive about the research process. Third, field notes may contain preliminary interpretations of behavior or note linkages between one observation and another. Thus, field notes begin the process of data analysis—the search for patterns and meanings. Fourth, field notes may contain reminders to the researcher about other research activities.

What exactly should novice researchers write down as fieldnotes? Some notes should be descriptive. They should answer the classic "who, what, when, where" questions of journalists. Accomplished ethnographers may include a great deal of descriptive detail in their field notes. Spradley (2016/1980, 68), for instance, argues that researchers need to unlearn some of their love of conciseness to capture an event with vividness. "In writing up field notes we must reverse this deeply engrained habit of generalization *and expand*, *fill out*, *enlarge*, and give as much *specific detail* as possible [italics in original]." If I were to observe the pope sitting at a café in Rome eating gelato, my field note should not say "Oh, I saw the pope having a snack." Some field notes attempt verbatim reconstruction of dialogue; others focus on recreating the atmosphere of an event. A descriptive field note may be:

- **A condensed account.** Putting down key points of initial observations while they are fresh in the researcher's mind (Spradley 1980/2016, 69).
- **An expanded account.** Relying on memory to recall as many details as possible about an event, using short notes taken in real time to jog the memory (Spradley 1980/2016, 70–1).
- An account that intentionally adopts a point of view and literary strategy (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011, 45–88). Thus, an account may involve:
    - ◊ **Writing dialogue.** The flow of conversation between people.
    - ◊ **Characterization.** "Presenting characters as fully social beings through descriptions of dress, speech, gestures, and facial expressions, which allow the reader to infer traits" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011, 69).
    - ◊ **Still-life sketches** that capture the sense of a place.

◊ **Vivid narration of an episode.** A slice of everyday life.

The limits of time and human energy mitigate against every descriptive note approaching a meticulous, novelistic level of detail. Nevertheless, one of the benefits of taking time to write detailed descriptive field notes is that they form a vast file of texture, color, and emotion that the researcher will use in written reports about the project, often called write-ups by ethnographers. In other words, they are the source of the thick descriptions so beloved by ethnographers and practical theologians. If the researcher does not record enough detail soon after events, it could be impossible later to remember everything that one might write down as a thick description in a report. A descriptive field note is not a piece of fiction.

Fieldnotes are also a convenient place to record the researcher's reactions to what she saw. Documenting such reactions is important, among other reasons, because, with repeated observations, the researcher might cease to be surprised that a recurring behavior happens again. Capturing initial moments of wonder and confusion may be helpful later when the researcher has made repeated observations and seems to have gained some understanding about the deeper meanings of activities in her study. A low-church Protestant observer of a Greek Orthodox liturgy might at first be overwhelmed by the smell of incense used during worship. Later, the novelty of this smell might wear off. Field notes remind the researcher about initial reactions or interpretations.

Here is one example of a field note that combines observation with the researcher's questions about the meaning of what was seen. The incident happened at a food bank. A shopper rejected one of the preselected items that she was given:

> She had a package of frozen turkey meatballs in her hand and said that she didn't want the package because the contents were expired. The meatballs had apparently expired two days prior to today, and she said that she did not like taking expired food to her house. (Why the emphasis on "my house?" Self-respect? Could it be that if she took the expired meatballs, she was somehow accepting hand-me-downs? Just because she is not paying full price doesn't mean she can't receive up-to-par food?) (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011, 81)

When undertaking observations in some settings, the researcher might be able to write extensive notes in real time. In such circumstances, Sensing (2011, 187–90) suggests that the observer keep a two-column record. In the left-hand column, the observer notes unfolding actions; in the right, she notes her initial interpretations and reactions. A hypothetical observer watching a congregational meeting, for instance, might write factual descriptions in the left-hand column (the physical space where the event took place, who was there, the unfolding order of business items) while noting in the right-hand column things like: "I can't believe that the treasurer did not have a written report ready," or "Some actions are approved by head nodding; others by formal motions. Why?" Many researchers keep a journal that is separate from descriptive field notes. The researcher can think out loud in the journal about the day's observations or the research process without fear of cross-contaminating what the researcher saw and heard (accurate observations) with what the researcher was thinking or feeling about the events observed (i.e., the researcher's inner life).

> **Thought Problem** What part of taking field notes is most interesting to you? What part of the process poses the most challenges for the kinds of observations that you might undertake?

Refined Observations

To complete my sketch of full-bore ethnographic observation, I need to say more about the continued process of observation. I am following Spradley (1980/2016, 85–99), who counsels that, after generating descriptive observations and documenting them, the researcher then begins an interpretive process that he calls a domain analysis. This domain analysis looks for patterns in social situations. These patterns are what we mean by culture. The domain analysis looks for patterns that suggest the meaning of activities to participants. (E.g., why is everyone constantly offering guests a cup of coffee?) The researcher discovers domains by noticing patterns in her field notes. She thinks along the lines of: *X is a kind of Y*, where X is one specific part of my concrete observation and Y is a broader concept. For instance, if you were reviewing field notes of observations made in a nursing home, you would notice residents, nurse's aides, nurses, administrators, janitors, chaplains, visitors, and others. Each of these Xs is a kind of person (Y). A nursing home, called a convalescent or elder care home in some parts of the world, is a facility for the residential care of elderly or disabled persons. You have discovered that there is a distinctive cultural domain of persons in this specific context. Or you might discover that bathing, eating, going to medical appointments, changing the channels on the television set, and being taken to recreational activities are kinds of "resident activities that require staff to help." In other words, the list of activities observed fits the formal pattern: These examples of X are a kind of Y.

After interrogating field notes for cultural domains, the researcher can make more refined observations if she chooses to make a deep investigation. Such investigations ignore some aspects of a culture in favor of others. Spradley (1980/2016, 101) notes that "most ethnographers adopt a compromise" by providing both a surface understanding of the entire setting and an in-depth understanding of part of it. In making refined observations, the researcher goes deeper into some aspect of the culture being explored. To continue with the hypothetical example of conducting observations in a nursing home, the researcher might choose to do focused observations on the repeated activity of worship services conducted by outside religious leaders. Take a few minutes and brainstorm some ideas about what you would be looking for as an observer of such worship services in a nursing home. Draw on your own life experiences and imagination.

> **Exercise: Focusing Observations on Worship Services in a Nursing Home** Based on our initial observations, you know that worship services at Little Bramblewood Eldercare take place in the home's chapel at a specified time right after lunch—12:45 p.m. An outside priest or minister leads these services. You have observed that some residents never attend; some attend certain services; some go to all of them regardless of who the outside worship leader is. What do you want to observe? List as many possible behaviors as you can.

Here are some ideas. I am basing these ideas on my life experiences as a former nurse's aide in a nursing home, a minister who regularly provided worship services in a nursing home, and a person whose father lived in a nursing home at the end of his life. Each researcher always brings his own life experiences and positionality to the task of observation. In focused observation about worship services at Little Bramblewood, I would observe:

- How are worship services announced or advertised?
- How do staff assist residents in attending? For instance, do residents who use wheelchairs receive help from staff?

- How do visiting worship leaders engage residents? Staff members? Do the worship leaders know the names of residents and staff members?
- What is the format of the services? How similar are they to a worship service in a church?
- Are there sermons? What is the theological content of them?
- How do residents participate in the services? For instance, is there singing?
- Which residents attend and who doesn't attend?
- What reasons do residents give for attending?
- Do staff members take part in services?
- What visitors attend services? Are they relatives of residents?

Spradley (1980/2016, 128–9) identifies yet a third level of observations, which he calls selective observations. This level of observation seeks to get at fine-grained differences in the culture being studied. Based on general and refined observations, interviews, and preliminary data analysis, the researcher would construct a detailed observation protocol for such selective observations.

Asking Questions Using Ethnography

What role does asking questions play in ethnography? In practice, participant observers ask questions throughout the process. In Spradley's careful sequencing of the research process, formal ethnographic interviewing happens after initial observations have been made. Because ethnography combines participant observation with structured interviews, researchers using ethnographic methods are likely to have become a comfortable part of a group before they begin interviewing in depth. Thus, the ethnographer has had opportunities to establish rapport with those she will interview (anthropologists like to call these persons "informants" rather than subjects or participants) prior to an interview itself. Spradley (1979/2016, 78–83) argues that building rapport is a process that moves from initial apprehension to a second stage of exploration, followed by cooperation, and, finally, full participation. In the first stage, the informant may feel uncertain or anxious about the purpose of an interview. Once the interviewer succeeds in lowering apprehension by explaining the purpose of the interview or asking relatively straightforward questions, rapport builds to the second stage, exploration. During this stage, the informant gets a better grasp of the boundaries of the interview. She grows to trust the interviewer as the researcher intentionally checks on meanings by restating what the informant said and repeating explanations as needed. In the productive third stage of an interview—cooperation—the informant and interviewer feel comfortable and the discussion begins to feel more natural, even though the researcher is in charge of the agenda. Finally, after repeated interviews, the researcher and informant reach a stage that Spradley calls "participation," in which the researcher can make fine-tuned analysis of the cultural scene being studied because of collaboration with informants.

When an ethnographic researcher is able to find a knowledgeable informant and conduct several interviews with her, questioning can become more complex and focused than when the researcher is able to conduct one or two interviews, the assumptions that I made when offering interview guidance in chapter 5. In that chapter, I emphasized the researcher's need

to let interviewees speak about themes as they wished. Anthropologists who interview the same informant multiple times can move from descriptive questions about a cultural setting to more structural questions (Spradley 1979/2016, 120–31). Descriptive questions ask informants "What does X look, taste, and feel like?" Structural questions ask about tentative interpretations that the researcher has made based on previous observation and interviewing. For instance, in a hypothetical study of seminary students, the researcher hears many students talk about "jumping through hoops" in relationship to their denomination's ordination process. The researcher also hears students talk about opportunities to perform leadership tasks in congregations for the first time as "baptism by fire." A structural question might be: "Is answering emails promptly from your committee part of jumping through hoops?" Or "it seems that 'jumping through hoops' is generally an annoyance for students but 'baptism by fire' is one of the best things about seminary. Do I have that right?"

> **Thought Problem** What technique discussed in chapter 5 is similar to asking structural questions?

In the arc of data collection in ethnographies, the general movement is from surface observations of a group (observer as curious sponge, soaking it all in), to reflection on field notes about those observations, followed by additional in-depth observations based on an initial analysis of what is going on. In turn, the researcher writes field notes about this second (or third) round of observations. Interviews with knowledgeable informants happen concurrently to observations. What is learned via interviewing and knowledge gained via observation are mutually reinforcing. The cycle ends when the researcher has made conclusions based on analysis of what she observed.

A point of emphasis for novice researchers is that the ethnographic approach to data collection stresses the importance and reliability of the researcher. Even without conducting a single formal interview, it is possible for trained ethnographers to make sophisticated analysis of small settings. By making initial observations and analyzing them, the ethnographer's interviews with participants can be focused on the specific aspects of behavior that have caught the attention of the researcher to probe what these behaviors mean, from the point of view of the study participants. In chapter 5 we noted that a dump, lump, and name focus group can generate themes about a phenomenon that the qualitative researcher can then pursue in detail during individual interviews. In ethnography, the skilled observer notes intriguing or puzzling aspects of a social setting, then asks study participants to talk more about them.

> **Thought Problem** Which research approaches (phenomenological, liberationist, project) is ethnography consistent with? Why?

I'm Not Just Like Margaret Mead? Observations Large and Small

The description of ethnographic observation sketched in this chapter may seem daunting. Most of our lives does not allow us to engage in sustained, long-term observation. However, it is important for ministry students to recall that, in all likelihood, they are not utter outsiders to social situations that form the settings for their research projects. If I am making observations about a congregation in my own tradition, I bring with me some background

knowledge about the beliefs and culture of that tradition. In marked contrast, when anthropologist Margaret Mead went to Samoa to study the transition of girls from childhood to adulthood there (Mead 1928), she was doing outsider ethnography. To a White, bourgeoise, American intellectual like Mead, almost everything about life in Samoa was different from her experience.

Ministry students frequently conduct insider ethnography. They are not starting from a condition of cultural ignorance. This bank of background knowledge should increase a novice researcher's confidence in his ability to make good observations and ask appropriate questions. As Moschella (2008, xiii) notes, this form of research invites the researcher "to slow down and 'hang out' for a while in the mud, paying attention and suspending judgments." Practicing pastors and ministry students know the value of listening for information, tone, and emotion. In contrast to the full-scale ethnographic study that I have described (three cycles of observation moving from the surface to the more particular), ministry students should make bounded observations, guided by their research questions and a feasible design for their project. Please complete the following exercise before reading my comments below.

> **Exercise: Creating A Right-sized Observation Protocol about a Worship Service** For a class about Christian worship, a professor wants students to observe Sunday worship at the same congregation for three Sundays in a row. Students will visit in pairs. One member of the team will belong to the denomination or fellowship of the church being visited. The other member will be affiliated with another part of the Christian Church. (Because there are students from a variety of backgrounds at this seminary, it is feasible for the professor to construct the assignment this way.) The point of this assignment is to increase the understanding of students about the complexity of Christians at prayer.
>
> - Help the professor design an observation protocol for students to use. Jot down your ideas for the things that students should attend to during their three observations.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, Spradley notes nine dimensions of every social situation. All of them are applicable to the observation of a Christian worship service. In his discussion of data gathering techniques for studying a congregation, Thumma (1998, 200–1) identified six elements in an observation protocol for a worship service:

- **Demographics.** The age, sex, gender, social class, and attire of people present.
- **Physical setting.** What is the building or place like? What props are used?
- **The event itself.** What happened during the service? Who did what?
- **Interactional patterns.** How do people relate to each other before and after the event, and on the edges of the main event?
- **Verbal and written content.** What do participants say and read that is not part of the structured event? (e.g., Pre-service conversation in the pews.)
- **Meaning.** Is there a main theme to the service? Was one emotional tone consistently conveyed?

How do your ideas compare to Thumma's protocol? To Spradley's? Did you include elements related to the social identities and intersectionalities of attendees? Perhaps you focused more narrowly on time, from the start of the service to the end. Thumma asks observers to notice conversations before and after the service itself. Some seminary students might focus on worship as a theologically ordered set of activities. Because of my Lutheran understanding of worship, for instance, I would want to pay attention to activities related to scripture, preaching, and the Lord's supper (if celebrated). Narrowly focusing on these "word and sacrament" aspects of worship, however, runs the risk of not noting a wealth of other aspects of the event, such as who is present (and perhaps who is not present), the physical space (Is there an altar? A communion table? Pews? Folding chairs? Display screen?), or how the event unfolded. Since our hypothetical professor wants students to notice the complexity of Christians at prayer, developing an observational protocol that asks for breadth (while admittedly sacrificing depth) is appropriate to the assignment. Because the professor has a pair of students visiting each service, the students might divide observational responsibilities. For instance, one week student A would note the various kinds of people attending the service, the next week student B would be responsible for that part of the observational protocol.

Thought Problem

- What advantages are there in having a partner when conducting observations? Does the value of having a research partner increase when the observers come from different cultural or religious backgrounds?
- How would you change your observation protocol if the professor wants students to focus on how the Bible is used in worship services?

Ethics in Observational Research

To conclude this discussion of the use of observation (whether using a full-bore ethnographic approach of sustained, repeated observation or smaller-scale observations), we now revisit ethical questions about recruiting and obtaining informed consent from study participants. In observational studies with a small and clearly identifiable number of participants, it is possible to obtain written informed consent from each participant. For instance, if I were to study how Sunday school teachers for middle school-aged children at a United Methodist congregation understand their roles, I might need to deal with a gatekeeper in each congregation (a minister, perhaps) and then recruit and obtain consent from a relatively small number of persons (the teachers and parents of the children in the classes). By contrast, if I wanted to observe many aspects of the life of this same congregation (worship services, committee meetings, Christian formation classes, etc.), it would not be feasible to obtain written consent from everyone that the researcher would observe.

In practice, the ethnographic researcher receives permission from key congregational leaders (e.g., a board of elders) rather than from each individual who might be observed. For instance, Corey Labanow (2006) wanted to study a congregation in the "emerging church" movement using ethnography. He had several discussions with the pastor, who negotiated the terms of the researcher's work. For instance, the pastor insisted that Labanow become involved in church activities and not simply observe them. Thus, this researcher was an ac-

tive participant observer. The pastor insisted on a high degree of anonymity when reporting findings (e.g., giving the congregation the pseudonym Jacobsfield Vineyard), and that the researcher collaborated with church leaders during the study. The pastor decided to inform the church's lay leaders about the presence of the researcher right away. However, members were not publicly made aware of his role until several months into the study. The researcher reported that, after a while, members of the congregation "appeared to become desensitised [sic] to the researcher's presence" (Labanow 2006, 138). Think about the ethical issues that such an approach poses for obtaining informed consent. Please complete the exercise below, then read my comments.

> **Exercise: Informed Consent and Participant Observation** Imagine that you want to use observation as a data collection technique for your qualitative research study of Sunday school teaching at one church. You want to observe three different groups of learners (one class of younger children, a middle school class, and an adult class). You tell your professor that each teacher will give written consent for you to make observations. You receive a message that you need to meet with your seminary's institutional review board (IRB) to explain how you will obtain permission to make the observations. How would you prepare? How does your understanding of your ethical obligations to participants shape what you will say?

In this hypothetical instance, the number of participants involved is small enough that a researcher might be able to obtain written informed consent from everyone individually. Obtaining such consent is made more complex because two of the classes involve minors. The student researcher should get permission from parents, not just the Sunday school teachers. As a researcher, I would prepare for my meeting with the IRB by explaining my plan to obtain written informed consent. I would argue that the dangers of participation in the study are no greater than everyday life—i.e., minimal. As a researcher, I am obligated to prevent harm to individuals as much as possible. In this case, the risk of harm (especially to the children) seems small. I would also tell the IRB that any names taken down in field notes would be redacted in any written documents describing the study. In this case, the student should be prepared to revise his plans if the IRB insists that she have written permission from the parents of children to be observed.

Mixed Methods: Beyond Interviewing and Ethnography

So far in this book, readers have been introduced to interviewing, focus groups, and observation as key techniques for data collection in qualitative research studies. In journal articles, researchers often report that they conducted a study using "mixed methods." This term is confusing because it is used in a variety of ways. Sometimes a researcher will call her study a "mixed-methods study" because she used both focus groups and interviews, or because she used observation and survey questions. Anthropologists are likely to claim that they used ethnographic methods, which typically include observation, interviewing, and analysis of cultural artifacts (whether the artifacts in question are stone knives or official records in government offices). The key point for novice researchers is that they should use data collection techniques that they can use with confidence and which provide needed data. In formal written documents summarizing a study (whether it is a term paper, a final DMin

project, or a journal article), researchers should spell out all of the data collection techniques used.

Here I describe three more data collection techniques: the case study method, documentary analysis, and project evaluation. The last is a requirement for researchers using the project approach because a project wants to achieve a tangible result within a set period of time.

The Case Study

Some social scientists and practical theologians refer to the setting for a piece of research as a "case." Sometimes *case study* refers to a particular approach to research design and data collection (Stake 1995). Creswell (2007, 73) notes that a case study approach explores "a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information." Yin (2003, 4) argues that the case study method is appropriate "when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context. Such a phenomenon may be a project or program in an evaluation study." In terms of data collection techniques, the case study stresses using multiple data sources. Yin includes the following sources (83):

- Interviews
- Observations of groups and physical objects
- Documents and archival records

Good procedures for interviewing and observation are already familiar to readers, so more about analyzing documents below. A virtue of case study techniques is that the researcher wants to examine the phenomenon of interest (whether it is a program to improve the reading skills of children or the Sunday school program of a congregation) using several sources of data. This virtue is sometimes called data triangulation. Researcher confidence that she really knows what is going on in a setting is increased when data collected from interviews, direct observation, and official records consistently point to the same themes. When the data from direct observation seems to contradict what participants tell the researchers in interviews or what official minutes record, the researcher has more work to do to make sense of the case.

To think more about case study data collection techniques, complete the following exercise. Then read my comments below.

> **Exercise: Just in Case** What is distinctive about case study techniques? Why would a researcher prefer to call her study a case study rather than something else?

Calling a piece of research a case study clearly signals the limits of the study—I am not studying all congregations, just one. This book alludes to dozens of examples of published studies which do not call themselves case studies although they were focused on "a bounded system" (i.e., a case) and used multiple techniques of data collection. Because qualitative researchers are hesitant about generalizing from one case to others, the term case study is appropriate as a way of noting the operational limitations of the study. To be sure, all qualitative research has limitations. From my point of view, case study data collection procedures have been widely used by anthropologists, sociologists, and practical theologians. The tech-

niques are not distinctive per se. A study that utilized a few interviews but mined twenty-five years's worth of congregational documents to understand the research site would certainly stand in the case study tradition of data triangulation. Some DMin programs might use the term case study to refer to expectations for the final project. Students in such a program should not quibble about methodological jargon (as I have done here) but work with faculty to produce a competent case study.

> **Thought Problem** How would a researcher's intention to use "mixed methods" influence how research questions are written?

Documentary Analysis

The analysis of documents pertinent to research questions is sometimes identified as a discrete form investigative technique. Thumma (1998, 210–13), for instance, suggests that "archival document analysis" is useful when studying congregations. Official records and a myriad of other written or visual forms of expression (printed worship bulletins, websites and blogs) produced by a congregation document the breadth and texture of its life. If I wanted to study the worship life of a congregation, for instance, I might observe worship services, conduct interviews, and review minutes of worship committee meetings. I could read worship bulletins to discover the order of service for Sunday worship and services for special days such as Christmas and Easter. If the preacher delivers sermons from manuscript, I might be able to read as many sermons as I wanted. If the congregation records worship services, another data source would be digital recordings of services. Similarly, if I wanted to study the workings of a local chapter of the Knights of Columbus (a Catholic organization for service whose members are men), I might use observation, interviewing, and documentary analysis of its official records and working papers as sources of data.

The process for collecting written or digital documents is straightforward. The researcher needs permission to look at whatever material is of interest. In the case of paper documents, the researcher needs to read them on the spot (for instance, if she wanted to read official minutes that are not widely distributed) or make copies. Because of advances in technology, I regularly see researchers take pictures of pages of primary source documents with a phone rather than take the time to use a photocopier. If the researcher wants to view recordings, the researcher can download files to a storage device. The challenge of making a documentary analysis part of a qualitative research study lies in reading (or viewing) and analyzing documents, not collecting them. As we will see in chapter 8, the process for analyzing documents has parallels with the careful reading skills that seminary students learn in seminary (hermeneutics) and the standard qualitative research practice of "coding" interview data to discover themes. The researcher who conducted a detailed analysis of many documents would need to reach an understanding with supervisors and those giving permission to use the documents about protecting the confidentiality of data and retaining/destroying copies after the completion of the study.

Thought Problems

- How does documentary analysis differ from interviewing people? How are these data gathering techniques complementary?
- If you were conducting a qualitative research study about decision making by the board of a local non-profit, what documents would be good sources of data? How would they provide data triangulation for your study?

Project Evaluation

The Centrality of Evaluation

In chapter 1, I identified the project approach as a distinct stance when conducting qualitative research. In the project approach, the researcher addresses a narrowly defined problem. Then the researcher implements a set of activities that respond to the problem. It is incumbent on the researcher to assess the extent to which the project made a difference. Thus, an evaluation process must be included when conducting a study using the project approach. To think about the complexities of evaluating various kinds of projects, write down your thoughts about how to evaluate the projects in the exercise below. Then read my comments.

Exercise: Data to Evaluate a Project For the examples below, what kind of evaluation process makes sense? What kind of data would a researcher need to collect?

- The director of a camping ministry for youth notices that fewer campers are coming from the sponsoring denomination and more are coming from congregations outside of the denomination. She receives approval from the camp board to spend money to increase relationships with congregations in the sponsoring denomination. [This scenario is based on Cahalan (2003, 4).]
- The leaders of a congregation know that students in the neighborhood have very low rates of graduation from high school. To increase graduation rates, they decide to offer a program of year-round tutoring for middle school and high school students.
- Working with church leaders, a pastor in a DMin program identifies “decision making processes” as an area of concern for the congregation. As a final project, the pastor teaches members of all church committees the “mutual invitation” method of holding conversations on difficult issues (Law 1993, 79–88).

In the first instance, the implicit premise of the project seems to be: if we establish tighter bonds with congregations from sponsoring congregations, then we will see an increased number of campers from the sponsoring denomination. The appropriate data to evaluate the success of the project are enrollment numbers. If more campers from the sponsoring denomination come to camp, then the project will have succeeded. In the second example, the stated goal is to improve the high school graduation rate for neighborhood students. Thus, the data needed comes from the school district—namely, high school graduation rates. Finally, the appropriate evaluation data for the DMin student’s project are some measurements of changes in the decision making processes in the congregation. The pastor would need to

determine how these processes have changed, perhaps by interviewing some church leaders and surveying members of church committees. In many DMin final projects, it would be appropriate to use a pre-test, post-test technique. The first evaluation (the pre-test) measures understanding before any project activities. The second evaluation (the post-test) happens after participants have experienced the student's ministry intervention. The researcher can then compare the results of the two evaluations. This technique is more fully discussed later in this chapter.

These examples demonstrate some of the challenges of designing an evaluation process for a project. One challenge is that time must pass before evaluators have any information about how successful these projects are. In the example of increasing the high school graduation rate, students might come to tutoring for three or more years before they become seniors and, hopefully, high school graduates. As Kathleen Cahalan notes, projects that want to make long-lasting changes unfold over time. These changes, or impacts, can be broken down to three types: "immediate, intermediate, and long term" (Cahalan 2003, 17). In the case of the tutoring program, it would be possible to measure the immediate impact of the program by noting whether students use the program. An intermediate impact would be that students get passing marks and continue to go to school. The long-term impact would be not just that one or two students who used the program graduate, but that the overall graduation rate rises over time. Of course, if participants in the program consistently graduate from high school at higher rates than the general population, the project would clearly be having a positive long-term impact.

Another challenge for project evaluation is the temptation to measure the wrong thing. As a camp director, I would no doubt report to my board how I spent the money allocated to enhance relationships with congregations. For instance, I might report the number of face-to-face presentations that I made. Those running tutoring sessions would keep track of how many students come to tutoring sessions. The pastor seeking to change how decisions are made should note attendance at training sessions. **Such measures, however, are measurements of effort, not success.**

Key take-aways for novice researchers are:

- Data collected to evaluate the success of a project must relate to the stated goals of the project, not to the processes used to implement the project.
- It is simply not possible in a short period of time to collect data about the intermediate and long-term impacts of a project.

This is a good place to say more about writing goals for a project in a qualitative research study. At my seminary, we recently completed a major project about our information technology infrastructure. We bought new software to keep track of student records. We also transitioned from one learning management system (LMS) to another. Our head of information technology understood these changes as a project. She worked hard to implement the interlocking parts of the project (sign contracts; migrate data; train users) within a stated time frame. From her point of view, the project was clearly successful because faculty, students, and staff are now using the new software. Now imagine that the faculty had identified problems in student learning. Imagine further that they concluded that changing to a state-of-the-art LMS would help students learn better. In this imaginary exercise, faculty might compare student learning using the old LMS with what students learned via the new LMS. The data to evaluate the success of the project would not be facts like the completion dates for getting software up and running and the price tag of the system; the appropriate data would be information about student learning. Remember, in a project, the researcher needs to identify the purpose and goals of the project (ministry intervention). Data collected need a

logical relationship to the project's stated goals. Moreover, evaluation of the project's impact also needs to map to the stated goals of the project.

Thought Problem Imagine that, for your DMin final project, you want to improve decision making in your congregation, as described in the previous exercise. What information do you need to collect to make evaluative judgements about the success of your ministry intervention? How would you write research questions that fit the project approach?

Rubrics: Focusing Evaluation on What Can Be Observed

In the world of education, one widely used method of evaluation is the use of rubrics (Alsina, Ayllón, and Colomer 2019; Blodgett 2017; Stevens and Levi 2012; Quinlin 2012). A ***rubric*** is a system for evaluating performance in a segmented way using a standard set of criteria. Let me give an example to help unpack the meaning of my definition. After the example, I will talk about how rubrics can be good evaluation tools for a qualitative research study using a project approach.

The field education director of a seminary wants to know about the preaching skills demonstrated by students when they preach "real sermons" in congregations. The director might choose to evaluate performance for five aspects of preaching: use of the human voice, eye contact, use of the Bible in sermons, what sermons say about God (theology), and connections to the everyday lives of listeners. The director will ask selected members of congregations to evaluate the student's preaching performance every time the student preaches. To help these evaluators achieve consistency in their approach, the director writes a description of three possible levels of performance. Let's call them "Masterful," "Improving," and "Novice." For the element "use of the human voice," the director writes the following descriptions for each performance level:

- **Masterful.** The preacher spoke clearly and used a range of vocal nuance.
- **Improving.** I understood what the preacher said, but there was little variety in tone, or the preacher was just reading from a manuscript.
- **Novice.** The preacher mumbled, talked too softly or loudly, or did not use the microphone.

The director writes descriptions for all remaining performance levels. When completed, the rubric is a matrix showing the elements to be evaluated in a column and descriptions for possible levels of performance in rows. In the beginning, the matrix would look like this:

Table 7.1 — Partial Rubric to Evaluate Preaching Performance

Elements	**Performance Continuum**		
	Masterful	Improving	Novice
Use of the human voice	The preacher spoke clearly and used a range of vocal nuance.	I understood what the preacher said. There was little variety in tone or the preacher was just reading from a manuscript.	The preacher mumbled, talked to softly or loudly, or did not use the microphone.
Eye contact	(description)	(description)	(description)
Use of the Bible	(description)	(description)	(description)
What the sermon says about God	(description)	(description)	(description)
Connection to everyday life	(description)	(description)	(description)

Each person using the rubric draws his or her own independent conclusions about how well the student preached. The evaluator marks the level of performance that is closest to their judgement about the sermon that they experienced. Judgements about each element are discrete. For instance, an evaluator could rate a student "Improving" on use of the human voice while rating the student "Masterful" for eye contact. To make sure that evaluators understand the rubric, especially the differences between each performance level, the director should train evaluators about how to use the rubric. The field education director will compile all of the ratings from evaluators and draw conclusions about how well students can preach. The field director has taken a ministry task (delivering a sermon) and broken it down into several segments (the five aspects). Evaluators were trained to make independent judgments against a set of criteria (the performance levels as described on the rubric).

Thought Problems For the example in Table 7.1, write down descriptions for each performance level (Masterful, Improving, Novice) for the element "Eye contact." Hints: The descriptions should be distinct enough so that an evaluator clearly understands the differences between each level. Do not define one performance level and then say that another level is "better" or "not as good as" the level given a clear description.

To push yourself further, write descriptions for each performance level for all of the remaining elements. Compare your work with the example in appendix E.

Notice that the rubric subdivides the student's performance as a preacher into several categories. Thus, the evaluator is not asked to make a general conclusion such as "That was an okay sermon," or "I would give that a B plus." Because all evaluators are using a standard set of criteria and common set of definitions for what each performance level means, individual evaluators can log their conclusions simply (by making a mark on a sheet) and the

field education director can tabulate them quickly. Just as importantly, the director could notice areas in which a given student was performing as a novice, better than a novice, or at a high level.

The director could also tabulate the ratings for all students and be able to make judgements about how well students as a group are perceived as preachers. In other words, data obtained by using rubrics provides data about the performance of individuals and groups of individuals. Thus, I can use a rubric to grade students individually and to evaluate how well a program is achieving its goals. In this example, data from rubrics would allow the faculty to draw evidence-based conclusions about how well students at their seminary are learning to preach. Evaluation results thus benefit students and the faculty. For instance, student preachers as a group might be judged to have wonderful theology but be poor at making eye contact. The feedback from the rubric identifies precise areas for improvement.

The reader may notice that the performance continuum seems to serve the same purpose as a Likert scale described in chapter 6. What is the difference? Respondents to survey questions that use a Likert scale are reporting their *opinions* or *preferences*. They simply know their own minds, or they have no opinion. By contrast, evaluators that use an observational rubric think about aspects of a real-world *event* (e.g., what a specific sermon says about God) that they have *observed*. Hopefully, evaluators have discussed the elements and performance continuum of the rubric. All evaluators are making informed judgments related to agreed-upon criteria. Whereas I would be challenged to know for sure how your choice of "strongly agree" is different from my choice of "agree" on answers to questions using a Likert scale, if we were both using a rubric properly, the difference between our connoisseur-like judgments would be clear. If we both mark "Novice" for use of the human voice, it is because the preacher either mumbled, talked too softly or loudly, or did not use the microphone. In other words, even though both Likert scale data and measures of performance using a rubric are both ordinal data (see chapter 6), rubric-based data should inspire more confidence when used as a tool for evaluation than a Likert scale.

Carefully designed rubrics can be good evaluation tools for a qualitative research study using a project approach. For example, in a project intended to improve the pedagogy of Sunday school teachers in grades 4 and 5, the researcher and collaborators might design a rubric to observe teachers "in action" both before and after training. As a best practice, it is important to develop a rubric as a group. This approach is sometimes called "authentic assessment" (Duinen and Vriend 2005). Inventing the rubric this way helps everyone involved to understand how rubrics work, to discern consistently the differences between performance levels, and to increase emotional buy-in for the project. For illustrative purposes, let's assume that there are three aspects of pedagogy of interest. The elements are:

- **Teaching the Bible.** Increasing understanding of key stories in the Old and New Testaments.
- **Including learners.** Conducting class so that every child is acknowledged and participates.
- **Helping children pray.** Intentional instruction in how to pray out loud.

It is possible to write a rubric that defines levels of performance for each element. At the start of the project, trained evaluators would observe teachers to determine how well they performed for each element. After training that addressed the three aspects of pedagogy of interest to the researcher's project, evaluators would observe teachers again and rate their performance using the same rubric. By tabulating evaluator judgements, the researcher would then compare the pattern of performance before training and after. The researcher

would be able to form judgements about the relative success of the project by comparing "before" and "after" ratings. Please practice writing descriptions of a performance continuum by completing the exercise below. Then, read my comments.

> **Exercise: Including Learners** For the pedagogical element "Including Learners," write descriptions for teacher performance on a spectrum of three levels: Novice, Improving, and Masterful. Remember, your description should enable evaluators to watch a teacher at work and then make judgments about how well the teacher included learners in that class session. Hint: review the definition of this element carefully.

The scope of this element is twofold: to acknowledge the presence of each child and to include them in class work. Here is one possible set of descriptions:

- **Novice.** The teacher does not call children by their names. The teacher spends most of class time talking to students without asking questions.
- **Improving.** There are some interactive classroom activities. The teacher asks questions, sometimes calling on children by name.
- **Masterful.** There are many interactive activities. The teacher frequently calls on children by name and praises their contributions. The teacher draws quiet or disengaged children into participation in class activities.

How do my descriptions compare with yours? In a real study, it would be important for everyone to agree that, for instance, interactive class activities are better than simply having children listen to the teacher. The rubric or accompanying directions might give examples of activities that count as interactive. Notice that the evaluator using my descriptions would need to make a judgement about just how interactive a class session is in order to decide between the "Improving" and "Masterful" levels of performance. The evaluator is required to make judgments: when does "sometimes" become "frequently"?

If you are thinking right now that there are a lot of moving parts to using rubrics to evaluate a project, you are correct. The researcher employing rubrics needs to know the precise elements that should be evaluated. In a project approach, these elements relate to the researcher's interest (as in a final DMin project) or a combination of the interests of the researcher and the group collaborating in the project. Such a collaborative approach is sometimes called action research and is sometimes used in studies following a liberationist approach (such as Reason and Bradbury 2013). The researcher would also need to lead a discussion about how rubrics work and craft description of performance levels. While a researcher might be helped by looking at examples of rubrics used elsewhere, it is likely that she will need to write them specifically to fit the requirements of her project. All of this work and planning is the warm-up. The researcher then needs to make observations using the rubric prior to conducting the training portion of the project, then again after training is completed.

Why go to all this work? The answer is that evaluation by rubric provides consistency to the evaluation process. Prescribed levels of performance help evaluators move beyond "I like this part but didn't like that part" judgements. Let's continue with the pedagogy project as an example. The table below shows hypothetical results from the project. I have assigned points to the performance continuum (1=Novice, 2=Improving, 3=Masterful). (I have reported the average of ratings rather than showing counts of raw data. I will explain my reasoning in chapter 10.) Using these data, complete the exercise below. Then, read my comments.

Table 7.2 — Rubric-Based Evaluation Results: Average Ratings

Element	Before Training	After Training	Change
Teaching the Bible	2.2	2.7	0.5
Including Learners	1.4	2.7	1.3
Teaching Prayer	1.7	2.0	0.3

Exercise: Project Success? What conclusions do you draw about the success of the hypothetical project about helping Sunday school teachers improve their pedagogy?

Based on these data, I would call the project a success. For each element, the average level of performance improved. The improvement, however, was not uniform. Before training, evaluators rated the teachers as being best at teaching the Bible (2.2). They rated them at 2.7 after training. Thus, there was an improvement of 0.5. Teachers improved the most on their ability to include students in learning. The average moved from 1.4 to 2.7, a rather large change (by more than one entire level on the performance continuum). Teachers also improved on the third element. Improvement here was the smallest, 0.3. In this case, I would also wonder why the training provided to teachers was better at helping them to include learners in classroom work than it was at teaching specific content.

Sometimes evaluators of programs have in mind an acceptable level of performance and state it before they collect data. In higher education, this level is sometimes called the "criterion of success," "acceptance outcome level," or "threshold of acceptance." (Why use everyday language when you can invent jargon?) In our hypothetical example, the researcher might have decided: "I will consider my training program successful if, after training, evaluations show that the average level of performance is 2.5 or higher for each element." If I had set this criterion for success, my judgement about how successful the project was would change to partial success, since only two out of three elements were rated at 2.5 or higher.

As we have seen, evaluation adds a new dimension of complexity to qualitative research. A researcher using a phenomenological or liberationist approach might be content to design research questions, collect data, and then summarize and interpret them. The result would be increased understanding of the lifeworlds of study participants. By contrast, researchers using a project approach want to assess the efficacy of some kind of ministry intervention. Thus, she must take up the burden of designing evaluative procedures and collecting data about program effectiveness.

Conclusion

This chapter describes data gathering techniques that do not primarily involve talking. Unlike individual and group interviews, participant observation assumes that a disinterested and skilled researcher can literally see, hear, and smell aspects of a group's life to get at what these activities mean for study participants. Documentary analysis delves into official accounts (like committee minutes) and working papers (like devotional leaflets for adults; activity booklets for children) that shed light on the complexity of a group's understanding of itself. The case study approach values the collection of data via several techniques to draw

conclusions about a bounded social group or activity of interest to the researcher—the case. When a study uses a project approach, the researcher needs to devise appropriate techniques to determine the impact of the "project" part of the project (the ministry intervention), seeking to determine the extent to which the project made a positive impact and met its goals.

As researchers design a study, they must choose among these data gathering techniques. There are times when a researcher using a phenomenological, liberationist, or project approach could employ any of them. By this point in the book, you should not be surprised as I remind the reader that the overall purpose of your study and your research questions should guide you as you decide which specific data gathering techniques to use.

CHAPTER 7: KEY POINTS

- Participant observation utilizes a trained observer to collect qualitative data about the behavior of people.
- Participant observers write extensive field notes to record observations.
- Writing an observation protocol helps researchers focus their observations.
- A researcher generally cannot obtain explicit informed consent from everyone that is observed during a study using participant observation.
- A case study method uses observation, interviewing, and analysis of key documents as data sources.
- A qualitative research study using a project approach needs to build in ways to evaluate the success of the project.
- A rubric is a system for evaluating performance in a segmented way using a standard set of criteria.

PART 3 IN SUMMARY

- Chapters 5, 6, and 7 have described a wide variety of data gathering techniques available for qualitative research studies. They are:
    - Individual interviewing
    - Group interviewing
    - Survey questions
    - Intentional observation
    - Case study
    - Documentary analysis
    - Rubrics as an evaluation tool for projects

PART 4

From Data to Interpretation

To this point in our discussion of qualitative research, we have explored how to focus on a topic of manageable size, recruit participants for the study, and collect data. All of these activities lead to the culmination of a study: sifting and summarizing data, determining its meanings, and reporting on the study in a coherent way. In Part 4 we explore:

- Fixing the form of data
- Finding patterns of meaning in data (coding)
- Moving from what participants ***said*** or ***did*** to what their words and actions ***mean***
- The importance of theory and researcher positionality in interpreting study findings
- Standard expectations for writing a qualitative research journal article
- Tips for writing up your study
- Distinctive expectations for Doctor of Ministry final projects

CHAPTER 8

Analyzing and Summarizing Data

One of these things is not like the others.

– *Sesame Street*, children's television show

We have been told that all snowflakes are unique—which is true on the molecular level—however, it turns out all snowflakes fall into one of 35 different shapes, according to researchers.

– Joanne Kennel (2015), science writer

Qualitative researchers collect data from study participants by asking questions related to the purposes of a study. In a modest study, a researcher can quickly amass hours of audio recordings and several completed questionnaires. A study using the project approach might have evaluation data. To use an analogy from the kitchen, by this point in a study, the researcher-chef has decided what recipe she is following (research questions) and assembled the ingredients (collected the raw data). The next stage of the research process involves prepping (analyzing data) and cooking (interpretation of the data). This chapter is about data. In the kitchen, prep work involves such activities as cleaning and chopping vegetables or breaking down a whole chicken. In the qualitative research process, prepping the data is the movement from a glorious jumble of raw data to a smaller set of documents that present the data in coherently summarized form. The tasks of analyzing and summarizing data are preparation for asking the intellectually fruitful questions, like: What do the data *mean*? *Why* did participants talk about their experiences as they did? Why were some participants so confident that things worked one way, but others were equally adamant that the world works another way? We will address interpretation of data (cooking) in chapter 9.

To move from baskets of raw data to coherent summaries requires fixing the form of data and sorting them into categories through a process called **coding**. The coded data are further analyzed until the researcher can summarize key themes in the data—even snowflakes fall into recognizable categories, as our epigraph points out. In this chapter we work through each of these steps in some detail and relate them to research design. First, the chapter discusses the rationale for coalescing data into a fixed form. Second, the concept of coding is introduced. While doing so, some time is spent teasing out the issues associated with categorization and power. Third, the distinction between coding to an extant theory and **free coding** is introduced. Fourth, the mundane process for noting patterns and marking text with the names of categories is described. As we will see, the coding process is conceptually the same whether the researcher uses index cards, magic markers, standard word processing software, or specialized qualitative data analysis software. Fifth, the move from coded text to

systematic summaries of data is discussed. The design of a study shapes how the researcher summarizes findings. Sixth, how quotations are noted and edited is discussed. Seventh, the benefits to researchers of having colleagues review data summaries are described.

Fixing the Form of Data

In a qualitative research study, you will amass notes about observations, recordings of interviews, and answers to questionnaires from study participants. Qualitative researchers call these texts, recordings, and documents "data." This term might seem dry or objectionable. After all, human beings have shared something of themselves (perhaps things that are highly personal) with you, the researcher. Labeling records about such fragile human experiences as mere data seems dismissive. If you feel a bit uncomfortable, you are onto something. Human experiences, even everyday ones, have depth to them. My ritual of grinding coffee beans, filling the coffee maker with water, and watching the dark trickle of fluid is full of sensual texture and, for me, anticipation. When I take my first sip, I may have a sense that all is right with the world, or that I am finally awake enough to face looking at my email inbox. The first sip of the day might recall memories of having breakfast with a departed spouse. My reporting of this everyday experience to you is one step removed from the experience. Philosopher Edmund Husserl noted that there is a sense in which all of our experiences are only grasped in hindsight (Husserl 1970/1954). If I tell you about that experience in an interview and you then turn my verbal communication into a written document by transcribing it, the transcript could be said to be two or three steps removed from my experience. When you pin down data as a researcher by capturing them on a digital recording and transcribing that recording, you have "processed" the data. You have turned the distinctive sounds of a human voice and the gestures that accompanied them during an interview into stable text. The transcript of your interview is, in several respects, far less rich than the real-time back and forth of the interview as an event.

There are, alas, important reasons for fixing your research data into such forms. For one thing, transcribing interviews protects study participants. Your voice may not sound like the voice of Selena or Beyoncé, but it is far more distinctive than a transcript of you speaking the exact same sentences. Transcribing interviews without attaching someone's personally identifying information thus helps to ensure the anonymity of the speaker. Transcribing an interview may also have the added benefits of "cleaning up" the data to make it more intelligible. You may have recorded an interview in a setting with a great deal of background noise. By transcribing the interview, you remove those distractions so that you can focus on the speaker's content. Perhaps the person that you interviewed also had an accent that made it difficult for you to follow the meaning of what she said in real time. By transcribing the interview, you typically use standardized spellings of words so that your brain will focus on their meaning. Unless you want to focus on regional differences in pronunciation, the transcribed sentence "She parked her car in Harvard Yard'' will be read the same whether the speaker grew up in Atlanta, Auckland, or Boston. A native-born Bostonian might actually have said words that sound like "She pawked her caw in Hahvad Yawd."

Researchers who create field notes benefit from treating them as textual data to be analyzed (coded) in the same way as interview transcripts (Sensing 2011, 202–6). In the rest of this chapter, I assume that the fixed form of data is alphanumeric: sentences and numbers that are stored digitally or on paper. As discussed in chapter 2, it is a good ethical practice to delete sound recordings of interviews once you have transcribed them.

Coding Data: Patterns and Researcher Power

Fixing spoken data into stable forms protects the anonymity of participants. In addition, a researcher needs to fix data into stable forms so that she can examine them over and over. This careful, iterative reading has several names: analysis, searching for themes, or coding. These terms are synonyms for the process of finding meaningful patterns in your interviews and questionnaire answers. In this book, I will use the term coding to refer to careful analysis of textual data, whether the source is an interview, documents from an organization being studied, or the researcher's own fieldnotes. The coding process involves both reading (noticing patterns) and marking pieces of text from a copy of a document (e.g., with a highlighter) so that the pattern is captured and the researcher and bring together all instances of a given code. The marking process is also called tagging. For discussion of tabulating and summarizing responses to survey questions, see chapters 6 and 10.

The Value of Analyzing Qualitative Research Data

At this point, I want to pick up on this chapter's epigraphs (especially the controversial notion that snowflakes are not unique) to defend the idea that researchers should trifle with the distinctive particularities of their data. Isn't it powerful to read collections of first-person testimonies? Why should researchers do more than simply collect data (transcripts) and edit them slightly, then present them to a waiting world (or, more likely, a professor or committee)? What is gained by putting lovely snowflakes into categories?

The enterprise of qualitative research is based on the premise that there is value in understanding social reality. Understanding social reality involves more than an aesthetic engagement with the data. Simply appreciating beauty is fine when I listen to music that I like. But the kind of research that ministry students engage in collects data for some purpose: often, to improve the quality of congregational life or ministerial practice. To get to "actionable" findings, researchers need to categorize and analyze. It's not enough to say that it snowed. We need to get at the various kinds of snowflakes that fell. If you promise readers that you want to know what themes study participants voiced, it's not enough to compile three hundred pages of transcripts and declare victory. You, the researcher, need to analyze and summarize data.

To get started coding data, consider the following two exercises. Complete the exercise before reading the discussion that follows.

Exercise: Patterns in Data 1 Look at these two lists of words. What patterns do you see?

- red, blue, green, yellow, spring, summer, fall, winter, north, south, east, west
- blue/yellow, red/green, summer/winter, spring/fall, east/ west, north/south

In this exercise, the first bulleted list contains three sets of things that belong together: primary colors, the seasons of the year, and the cardinal points on a compass. The second contains the same words, but they have been grouped into pairs by use of the backward slash. That seems to hint that there are six pairs, which appear to be opposites. Blue and yellow are opposites on a color wheel. Summer is the hottest season; winter is the coldest. East is 180 degrees opposite of west on a compass. I imagine that most people would make sense

of these words in this way. Notice that you were able to interpret the data because you had background knowledge about colors, the season, and directions. There are no contextual clues except for the pairings that I provided.

You might notice other patterns in these lists. For instance, some students who have done this exercise have reported that the first list contains one three-letter word, four four-letter words, three five-letter words, and four six-letter words. It is also an accurate observation to note that none of the words in either list begins or ends with a vowel and that most of the words contain short vowel sounds rather than long ones. (You can check these analytic observations yourself.) You were able to verify the accuracy of this analysis only because you know grammatical and orthographic conventions about parts of words and how letters are sounded in so-called standard English.

Now complete another exercise. It contains paragraphs rather than single words.

Exercise: Patterns in Data 2 Read these three quotations, taken from interviews about how students write the first draft of a research paper. What patterns do you see?

1) When I'm writing my first draft, I write in large blocks of time, when I get to the end I'm tired and, even if it's not due for a couple weeks, once I get toward then end I'm like, ok but when I revise that usually the part that gets beefed up because I'm really strong at the beginning. For a five page paper, an outline is in my head, anything more than that and… it also depends on what kind of paper it is like my theology paper I did tons of preparation for because that the discipline that I love and I suppose it has to do with level of interest priority wise.

2) I always cringe at the term first draft because I don't write first drafts, I write something that's evolving the whole time until it's complete. In my head I think I jump around a lot and I think my papers reflect that, if you read one that's half done there's a lot of sections that aren't yet connected sometimes at least not explicitly, in my mind I have some idea what the connection will be but there's usually little chunks of information here and there that will eventually be one cohesive document hopefully, that's something that I make sure . . . Is making papers flow partly because that's the way I do it seems to be. I can't sit down and write a paper from start to finish and then go back and edit. I don't write drafts in that sense.

In my head yeah I have an outline but I don't write it out usually but sometimes that's what the first effort will be is even writing out some headings and then writing sentences underneath those so in a sense that's an outline, I have some idea where things are going and what the sections of the paper might be.

3) I'll look at the information I've gathered, and if I have a 20 page paper, I'll break it down into sections. So I'll think, how can I logically break this down, usually into three or four sections, and that'll make my notes logically sift themselves out to where they need to go. I don't write a formal outline like they made us do in high school, but I always seem to have one in my head.

In the second exercise, you are reading transcribed sentences from a study about how seminary students write term papers (Lincoln and Lincoln 2011). A focus group had identified several themes, including gathering information, writing a draft, and revising. Participant one's process is something like soldiering through to write a full draft in one big writ-

ing session. This participant also admitted that she might work harder on a theology paper than a paper on another topic. Participant two did not like the term "writing an initial draft" at all but reported a process in which the paper is constantly evolving as the writer seeks to put down in writing the connections that exist in the mind. The third participant reports a more systematic process of breaking down material ("the information I've gathered") into sections. The first two participants seemed to be against formal outlining but said that they have an outline "in my head."

In the full study, I interviewed eleven students. Aspects of writing a first draft, for that group, included setting aside time to write a draft, making an outline (for some), and asserting that there was no separation between writing an alleged first draft and making revisions. Finding patterns in interview data takes more patience than discovering patterns in short phrases or words as in exercise 1. Many interviewees take a while to discover what they really want to say—by speaking out loud. Others like to give specific examples and draw the inference that they have a habitual way of doing things or an enduring opinion. Even in brief interviews, a study participant is likely to repeat the same idea several times. (See texts in the databank for examples.) My point is that coding data is fundamentally the same process regardless of the quantity of text that you need to analyze. You are trying to find patterns of meanings in the sentences spoken by participants. Unless your research focus is on sentence length or grammar, a researcher would not look for such characteristics in her data. Because participants frequently work out what they think out loud, the researcher needs to patiently read interview texts several times to discover the patterns in her data. Social scientists commonly call these patterns "themes" or "affinities" without any distinction in meaning.

Problematizing Categories

Before we move ahead to consider specific steps in the process of coding data, it is important to take a step back and consider the human ability and love of putting ideas, objects, texts, and even persons, into discrete categories. It might be tempting to think that all the categories that qualitative researchers use are just like the supposedly neutral categories used by chemists or biologists. Aren't our categories "just there?" For instance, the scientific category of "elements" helps us appropriately notice that oxygen is different from hydrogen at an atomic level (the numbers of protons, neutrons, and electrons). The general category "tree" helps botanists distinguish between pine trees, birch trees, and oak trees. Even scientific categories, it turns out, are quite slippery. Once upon a time in ancient Greece, scientists affirmed that the fundamental elements of the world were earth, air, water, and fire. As investigations in the hard sciences continued, new sets of categories took over. Thus, chemists today name more than two hundred elements and note their relationships in the periodic table of the elements. The ability to sequence the genome of plants and animals has led scientists to re-assign relationships in the "tree of life" (Ede and Cormack 2017). Scientific categories change as science advances.

Although some categories that qualitative researchers use point towards commonly occurring categories (every human culture that regularly encounters rain has at least one word for it), our human need for putting things in their places is profoundly influenced by the particular culture that has shaped the researcher. It makes a difference who is making the judgments. Consider the following exercise. Work through it, then read my comments.

> **Exercise: Promises, Promises** Below is a list of twenty terms. Organize them into categories that make sense to you. Do not look up any terms that are unfamiliar to

you. Then, see if you can come up with another arrangement that also makes sense to you. Use your imagination.

A home mortgage	B marriage vows	C pledge of allegiance to my country	D God's covenant with Israel	E product warranty
F pinky swear	G politician's campaign promises	H website terms of use agreement	I bargaining with God	J weather forecast
K driver's license	L adoption agreement	M "best friends forever!"	N right to vote in elections	O Jesus' promise of eternal life
P a cookie recipe	Q sewing pattern	R advice from financial advisor	S confessing Jesus as Lord and Savior	T the Shahada

One set of categories is: divine promises to people (D,O), promises that people make to God (I, S, T, and B), legally enforceable promises (A, E, K, and N), and other kinds of promises (everything else). I placed the Shahada (the confession of Muslims that there is one unitary God and that Mohammed is the ultimate profit of God) in this category because it seems to parallel the personal confession of faith in Jesus (S). I also placed marriage vows in this category because historically Christians have understood that marriage involves God as well as the two persons involved.

A second way to arrange most of these individual items into smaller categories might be on a spectrum of seriousness: while heartfelt, items F and M are far less serious kinds of promises than legally enforceable contracts or rights (A, E, K, L, N, possibly H). A weather forecast might be very serious if it contains a hurricane warning, but less serious if it is a matter of whether or not it will rain on my picnic. Sets of directions (P and Q) and advice from a financial planner (R) are less or more serious. Promises related to God fall at the upper end of the seriousness spectrum. Are your categories similar to the ones that I came up with?

Notice the importance of cultural knowledge in my explanation of category formation in the previous paragraph. If I were unaware of the Old and New Testaments as scripture, I would not be able to connect items D and O together into a category like "promises God has made." Similarly, if I do not know very much about Christianity and Islam, I would not know that items S and T are roughly analogous and fit together as "promises made by believers to God." The notion of legally binding written contracts is also something found in many, but not all cultures.

Who Wields The Power to Categorize?

Many scholars have pointed out that categories relate to social and political power. Elites who hold legal and religious power, for instance, decide who is sane and who is possessed by evil spirits or is mad (Foucault 1988). Feminists have noted that "the power of naming" entails the power to make certain people (viz. women) disappear from the historical record by insisting that the category "man" is always the only term needed to describe an individual or group of individuals (Schüssler Fiorenza 1996). Many societies have used categories about different kinds of persons as instruments of control. For centuries in Europe, one was either a serf, a freeman, or a noble. Colonial Spanish America and Indian society had commonly understood and legally enforceable categories of caste. During the apartheid era in South Africa, a person's government-issued documents designated individuals as Black, Colored, or White. In the United States, racial categories were part of the Jim Crow regime that systematically oppressed Black citizens (Vann Woodward 2002). Accepting the use of such racial distinctions as tools of social control tacitly or explicitly is a racist stance (Kendi 2019).

My point here is a word of caution to qualitative researchers as you find patterns in data. Despite your best efforts, you will bring to bear who you are and what you know as you code data. You exert power as you handle information given to you by study participants. It is common for a qualitative researcher to collect data from dozens of people who may not even know each other. The researcher then compares what various people said and comes up with interpretations that might never occur to the individuals involved. In a real sense, they are defenseless against the researcher's judgments. Later in this chapter, I will present suggestions for how to check your interpretations to lessen the power disparity between the researcher and study participants. Right now, consider the ethical implications of your power as a researcher to interpret (categorize) by thinking about the questions in the following exercise.

Exercise: With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility

- How do the ethical values discussed in chapter 2 inform your understanding of your responsibilities as you look for patterns in data? What other values that you hold would also shape your use of researcher power in coding data?
- Reflect on the concepts of intersectionality and positionality introduced in chapter 1. How should they inform you (with your specific cultural, religious, and family backgrounds) as you engage persons and the data that you gather from study participants?

In chapter two, I noted that researchers are obligated to respect participants and to be faithful in presentations of participant opinions. At a minimum, a researcher needs to be able to recognize patterns in data (e.g., a common theme) and take them seriously even in cases where participants aren't saying what the researcher wants to find. For instance, I conducted a study about how theological students write research papers (Lincoln and Lincoln 2011). As a professor and librarian, much of what students told me was at odds with what I thought good practice should be. Nevertheless, as a researcher, my ethical obligation was to code those transcripts accurately. Respecting study participants means accurately coding and analyzing all responses.

The concepts of intersectionality (each of us is a complex self that cannot be captured in a simple descriptor like gay, straight, rich, poor) and positionality (my relationship to participants in my study as shaped by my background, training, and research agenda) should mod-

erate our desire to be seen as clever experts who are able to unlock novel insights through our superior use of academic techniques. Researchers do their best work when they constantly acknowledge that they are guests, not geniuses. Only humble prophets should receive honor.

Coding to Theory

In general, there are two approaches to coding transcripts and other textual data: ***coding to theory*** and free-text coding. In coding to theory, the analyst (researcher) has in mind a published theory (explanation) and wants to discover the extent to which aspects of theory are found in a set of data. Before proceeding further, I need to say more about what I mean by theory.

What is a Theory?

In the social sciences, a theory is an explanation for significant patterns in data. In disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and psychology, pride of place is given to "theory building"—the effort to look at dozens (or thousands) of studies and determine underlying mechanisms that provide reasons for the empirical findings. A theory is good to the extent that it provides a robust explanation for repeated findings. To paraphrase the rabbi in *Fiddler on the Roof,* there is a theory for everything. Life course theory explains commonly observed patterns across the human lifespan (Hunt 2005). Field theory provides an explanation for how individuals navigate their social environments (Lewin 1951). There are dozens of theories to explain why persons seek information in the ways that they do (Ford 2015). In congregational studies, there are theories to explain repeated patterns in the life of Christian communities (Galindo 2004).

Terminology about "theory" is confusing. Sometimes social science literature calls an explanation a theory, sometimes a model. For instance, a widely used explanation for how individuals become more skillful at a practice is commonly called the Dreyfus *model* rather than the Dreyfus theory (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1980). In some disciplines, explanations are called *laws*, such as the law of supply and demand in economics. To pass muster as a theory in the way that I use the term, a theoretical account must set out to provide an explanation—that is, make an assertion about why or how things were discovered to be as a researcher found them. The "thick descriptions" much loved by qualitative researchers are not theories in the narrow sense because they do not talk about why a microculture does what it does. Rather, thick descriptions often attempt to persuade readers of their truth by sheer immersiveness, just as the player of a video game becomes engrossed in the world created by the game. While playing the game, a player forgets that it is not "real," but is caught up in responding to the activities and environment that the designers of the game have created. Similarly, thick descriptions seem to be true or persuade me that "things happened just as the researcher told me" not because of explanations but because of the endless stream of vivid detail.

Let's look at three hypothetical examples of studies that use a theory as the basis for coding data. First, a researcher may conduct a study about the process of coming to terms with one's own death. The researcher is a chaplain who designs a study, receives appropriate permissions, and interviews persons under hospice care. The researcher states the research question: Do patients talk about their impending deaths consistent with the theory of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1969)? In her theory, there are marked stages through which dying people

pass: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. To answer the research question, she reads interview transcripts looking for five key themes that Kübler-Ross identified as stages. She would also want to know if patients go through these stages sequentially as Kübler-Ross states. Second, another researcher might conduct a study about the importance to congregants of an annual event like a spring fair or talent show. There isn't a lot in the Bible to suggest that such activities should be part of the life of Christian communities, yet these events frequently are important to congregants. In this case, the researcher might employ a theory about how the congregation understands its identity as part of Christ's church. Galindo (2004, 115–31) identifies three theoretical components: spirituality, stance, and style. When coding interview data, the researcher would look for instances of the three elements of identity that Galindo posits. Third, another researcher examines whether the working of a pastoral call committee might use Tuckman's (1965) theory about the five stages that a small working group goes through.

When coding to theory, the analyst (researcher) has decided in *advance* what is of interest. The table below lists start codes derived from the three theories underlying our hypothetical studies. A start code is an aspect of a theory. The analyst who is coding to theory looks for text that is consistent with one or more aspects of the theory and marks (tags) that text with the corresponding code. The decision to code to theory allows the analyst to pass over other things in the text which may be otherwise noteworthy, but which do not fit into the theory. As the researcher reads transcripts, she literally marks pieces of text that contain words or ideas that fit one of the theoretical start codes. We'll get to the nuts and bolts of marking up text later in this chapter.

Table 8.2 — Start Codes for Three Theories

Stages of Dying	Congregational Identity	Stages of Group Development
denial	spirituality	forming
anger	stance	storming
bargaining	style	norming
depression		performing
acceptance		adjourning

Let the coder beware: it could turn out that few or no participants say things that are consistent with the chosen theory. As a matter of ethics and competency, the researcher should notice if the data are not consistent with the chosen theory rather than hammer square pegs into round holes. The coder also needs to look for examples that fall into a theoretical category. Phrases in the text might not use the name of the category itself. For instance, a coder looking for phrases about the category "Bible" must recognize that a phrase like "I am a John 3:16 kind of person" is a reference to the category Bible just as much as the phrase "like the Bible says" would fit this category.

To code qualitative research data in conversation with a theory, the researcher must have a theory in mind soon after data have been collected, if not before. While scholars may have the time to consider and discard "several potential frameworks before one is finally chosen" (Mertz and Anfara 2006, 189), given all of the other demands on ministry students, how do they discover theories that fit their research questions? As a practical matter, such theories

are most likely discovered in two ways. First, your professor may have strong opinions about a theory and urge or require you to use it in your study. Second, while reviewing literature for your study, you may have encountered one or more theories that might be pertinent. It is also possible that you find a theory that fits your data only after you have finished coding. Glaser and Strauss's notion of grounded theory insists that theories should be teased out of findings rather than preemptively imposed on data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I have more to say about bringing theory to bear on findings in chapter 9. In this chapter, I assume that a researcher has identified a theory early enough in the research process that he can code interview data to the theory during the analysis phase of the project.

Treating a Doctrine as a Theory for Coding Purposes

In a qualitative research study, a ministry student might use a doctrine as a theoretical measure for coding. This approach would be justified based on the study's focus. A ministry student might notice that there are several views in a congregation about what constitutes "the right kind of" worship. Part of "the right kind" might involve explicit theological understandings. The researcher might code data using her tradition's official statements about group worship. Thus, a Lutheran might key coding off of the commonly affirmed view that orthodox (= Greek for "the right kind") worship happens when "the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word" (Augsburg Confession, article 7, German text, in Kolb and Wengert 2000, 42.) This doctrinal statement yields two codes, one about preaching and the other about sacramental acts. In another case, a minister interested in how people come to religious faith might code interview data with respect to doctrine about the stages of conversion. The stages of the process become start codes. Doctrinal understandings of conversion vary by theological tradition (Collins and Tyson 2001; Waers 2016). As the researcher reads interview transcripts, she tags phrases corresponding to a given code. Finally, in a hypothetical study of how active church members understand what it means to be a Christian, a researcher might use selected characteristics of the Christian life as start codes. In the independent Christian Church of my youth, church members were described as "praying, tithing, soul-winners." A researcher conducting a study among Christian Church congregants could use these three characteristics as three start codes. Notice that the same set of transcripts could be coded to a social science theory or coded using a doctrine as the benchmark. In such a case, the resulting summaries of data would be quite different because of the different choices made about what counts as interesting for the study. Categories matter.

In short, coding to theory is analogous to a prospector panning for gold in a stream bed. The prospector knows exactly what to look for (gold ore). Everything else is dross. A researcher coding to theory looks for aspects of the theory in transcribed data and documentary sources and passes over other parts of what participants shared.

Free Coding

Going with The Textual Flow

By contrast to coding to theory, analysts (researchers) doing free coding have not made decisions in advance about what is interesting. A research question might simply state (in phenomenological fashion) "What themes did participants voice about topic X?" Themes in

interviews are discovered by reading and attending to what people say. If your project is phenomenological in orientation, you probably will use the free coding approach. Because of the open-endedness of free coding, it may seem on the face to be more difficult than coding to a theory. After all, until you plow through several transcripts, you may not discover a common thread in the discourse of participants. By using a good research design, however, a qualitative researcher will already have found some ways to break down the general topic of interest into several subtopics. This makes free-text coding proceed more quickly. For instance, researchers using the "dump, lump, and name" (DLN) focus group described in chapter 5 employ the group itself to break down the general phenomenon of interest into several themes. During follow-up interviews, open-ended questions take the form of asking about those parts of the whole rather than reverting to a higher level of generality. The bolded text below provides more detailed directions about how to begin free coding using your word processing software.

Preparing DLN Transcripts for Free Coding

Let's assume that your DLN focus group identified five themes related to your general topic. Let's further assume that you go on to interview seven participants about each of those five themes.

1. After transcribing all seven interviews, create five separate documents, one for each theme.
2. Using the cut-and-paste feature, copy all text about Theme 1 from the seven transcripts and paste it into the Theme 1 document. As you do so, mark text from individual participants so that you know which person said which things. Mark the text at the level of short paragraphs.
3. Repeat this process six more times for Theme 1. You have now collected text from all interviewees about Theme 1.
4. When finished, you will have a long document about Theme 1 that contains many paragraphs that look like this:

   [Person 01] text. . . .

   [Person 01] text. . . .

   [Person 02] text. . . .

   [Person 07] text. . . .
5. Congratulations! Save a version of this document. You are now ready to begin coding Theme 1. You should open the document that you made, then save it under a new name so that you do not lose the uncoded text about Theme 1 as you work.
6. Repeat steps 2 through 5 for the remaining themes. Your coding will go much faster because you have prepared individual documents for each main theme.

Whether a researcher uses free coding, coding to theory, or a combination of both approaches, let the researcher understand that coding is a repetitive process. The researcher needs to read interview transcripts multiple times to find all phrases and ideas that corre-

spond to start codes (in the case of coding to theory) or the categories that bubble up in free coding.

Excursus: Group Realities versus Individual Realities

In the instructions above, I directed would-be coders of a study using a DLN approach to take apart each transcript from a person interviewed and to reassemble them as a series of texts about Theme 1, Theme 2, etc. In other words, I asked you to create a longish document that contains what everyone said about a given topic in one place. I need to explain why that is a sensible decision. Fasten your philosophical seatbelt because my explanation will involve a bit of philosophy. Let's consider a hypothetical Christian congregation that came into being as an online-only expression of Christianity during the COVID-19 epidemic. Let's call it Faithful On-line Disciples (FOLD). Very quickly, FOLD developed its own ways of being church. Worship services, children's Sunday school, Bible studies, committee meetings, and other typical congregational activities—all of these took place online. Once the epidemic died down, FOLD kept right on going. As a researcher used to face-to-face congregational life, you are fascinated with FOLD and want to study the congregation using qualitative research methods. Implicitly you are assuming that, just as it is sensible to think, "What is it like to be a bat?" or "What is it like to be an African American minister in a primarily White denomination?", it is also sensible to ask some detailed variations on the fundamental question "What is it like to be part of Faithful On-line Disciples?" In other words, you imagine that groups have their own distinctive realities. Congratulations, you are not alone.

Several schools of philosophy have thought about this question and made compelling cases for the coherence and usefulness of studying group reality. Phenomenological philosophers in the tradition of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merlou Ponty (Sokolowski 2000) and philosophers who might be considered as pragmatists or analytic (notably, John Searle) have mused about the problem of whether the social world that I live in is my distinctive possession or is a shared reality. The philosophers that I've mentioned (we can call them the "Correct Philosophers") have concluded that we can talk about group realities confidently. For instance, my household pays many bills via electronic transfers. This system works quite well when the stunningly complex utility that we call the Internet is behaving. When I make a payment to my utility company using my credit card, my request is routed from my computer to Pedernales Electrical Cooperative (PEC). Because I possess a credit card with a certain account number and I give PEC permission to draw funds from my account, I can pay last month's bill. Electrons move around the Internet and eventually PEC says that I have paid my bill. I happen to pay my credit card bill with a check from my credit union (because I am old fashioned). The document called a check counts as money just like the chain of mouse clicks counts as money. This all happens twelve times a year. As John Searle points out, such economic actions happen because of implicit social agreements: we all agree on how money works. Because of these odd but common epistemological constructs (and sophisticated technology), I can pay by bills from home. Searle calls the process of creating these agreements the "construction of social reality" (Searle 1995). Notice, none of this would work if the Internet, utility company, the credit card account, and the credit union only existed as ideas in my mind/brain and the Internet that you use was the one that exists only in your mind/brain. In Husserl's terms, we share one intersubjective reality.

I hope that you are all relieved. I am making this philosophical point because it is the epistemologically required underpinning for noticing, as social scientists and practical theologians do over and over again, that different cultures (say, currently living Welsh speakers who live in the eastern part of Great Britain), different world-wide associations of Christians

(the Anglican Communion or the Catholic Church), and different microcultures and small groups (members of FOLD or the faculty of the college that you went to) have their own group realities. If I want to study group reality in a qualitative research study, then I will want to aggregate data from several people so that I can discover common themes voiced and shared by *more than one person*. I assume that the lifeworlds of different social groups may be quite different from each other. I respect those differences. I will need to keep track of my transcripts (data) in such a way that I can know whether a theme or subtheme was voiced by almost everyone, several people, or just one or two. The directions that I gave above (to break up transcripts from individuals and reassemble them by themes) are useful when researchers want to study group reality. A decision to study group reality does not presuppose that everyone in the group will have the same opinion but does presuppose that people in the group identify themselves as belonging to it and that membership in the group creates social bonds between individuals.

By contrast, there might be times when my study is less concerned about group reality but more concerned about describing and analyzing the inner life of an individual person. If my main research question is "How do senior citizens who have been life-long churchgoers describe their changed understanding about the Bible?", then my initial way of coding data should give pride of place to each participant. It would make sense to code everything said by participant 01 and find the key themes in her transcripts. Having moved through data from all participants in my study (let's say a dozen), I might discover that the changes in understanding Scripture fall into two or three main trajectories. But I would not be able to notice those clusters unless I first used each person as the "unit of interest" for my analysis. In the design of a study and in coding data, the researcher needs to make a choice about whether she is primarily concerned about group reality or individual reality.

> **Thought Problem** Is the idea of the construction of social reality new to you? How is it like such ideas as congregational culture or workplace environment?

The Coding Process in Detail

Manual Coding

In the days before computing, the process of coding in qualitative research was quite low-tech. Researchers would often cut up a printed interview manuscript into smaller chunks (like a paragraph) and glue the smaller units of text onto index cards. To help keep track of which participants cards were which, the researcher would write an identifier. So, if I had interviewed seven persons, I would have a stack of cards each marked 1, 2, 3, etc. If the researcher was using start codes, the researcher would have the list in hand. As she read each card, the researcher would ask herself: Does any of the text on this card match any of the themes that I'm looking for? If the answer was no, the researcher would move that card aside and read the next one. If a phrase matched one or more of the start codes, the researcher would write the appropriate code number on the card. Eventually, the researcher would have seven stacks of cards tagged with codes. As a best practice, the researcher would have carefully read each transcript (= stack of cards) many times. In a second phase of analysis, the cards were re-stacked by start codes.

If the researcher was not using any start codes, the researcher would begin reading cards and ask: Is what I am reading on this card the same or different from the previous card? When two cards seemed to have something thematically in common (something more or less the same), the researcher would place them in one pile. After patiently going through all of the cards, there might eventually be several piles, each representing a theme. At some point, the researcher gives a name of the common element for their various stacks, which speeds up the process of finding a home for each card. Notice that my description of coding does the same thing as asking Spradley's question: If this X is a kind of Y, what is Y in this context? The work done by focus group members in a dump, lump, and name focus group also uses this process to determine themes. Using the sorting and stacking approach makes it harder to tag a card for more than one theme, unlike an approach where you write the theme name or identifier on the cards themselves. As you can see, when coding, the researcher builds on the analytical skills celebrated in the television show *Sesame Street*'s famous jingle, "One of these things is not like the others." The coder notices differences and similarities.

At this point, it has no doubt dawned on you that coding data is a meticulous process requiring patience, solitude, and caffeine. The coding process can be done somewhat more quickly using standard word processing software or dedicated programs. This section shows examples of coding using the word processing program that you have on your computer. A researcher can competently code even a large amount of data this way without spending money on a dedicated program like Dedoose or NVivo. The tables below show some text that I coded using text highlighting and special characters in MS Word.

Table 8.3 — Partial Coding Key for the Theme: Writing a First Draft

Outlining: <u>underlined</u>	Note taking: **bold**
Rough draft: *italics*	No to draft and revise: {text}
Organizing quotations: [text]	The right way/traditional way: #text#
Start writing: **<u>bold underlined</u>**	In my mind/head: &text&
Structure/flow of the argument: *gray italics*	

Sample Text from One Participant Coded with MS Word: Interview 18

18 {I don't claim that I write a first draft.} #I've been told that I should.#

18 I have my Word document on the right side of the screen while I research on my left so what I do is [I begin to take out quotes.] If it's a lot of research [I'll have to put the quote and then below in italics or in a different font I'll put my comment] how this pertains to the argument and then I'll go down, and then another quote. So I'll get [a full page of quotes] and…

18 This is at the point where [you have all your books in front of you, you have all your articles;] you're not going to find any new information. **<u>You're simply there to assimilate what you have.</u>** So I'll go through what I have [and I'll take quotations out as I go] as they pertain to the argument.

18 The outline comes next, so [first I'll do quotations that I think are interesting] or could pertain to the argument at some point &because the argument is mostly in my head at this point. I might have a 1 2 3 argument on a scrap piece of paper saying "this is my thesis, this is the problem with the thesis, this is where I want to get"& or sometimes I just have "this is my thesis."

18 [I go through the quotes], each quote underneath will have my comment, once I have [all my quotes and all my comments,] so this takes a while because you've got to read through all the information and then type it out over here but I can read my Word document and *see a bigger picture*. You can trace the line of each author's argument and how it needs to fit in my argument.

18 If I'm feeling really good, I'll take out a white piece of paper and write an outline. I do that on a piece of paper because I just like the way it looks. It'll be a general outline and then I'll go through and [color code each of the quotes;] pink would be for the first part of the argument, red for the next point so I can sit . . . when you first look at it, [it's organized by author] and by whatever source it came from.

18 Then I go through once I have my outline and [resort the quotes] to how they fit in the argument. [So then I move all the red ones to the top and all the yellow ones to the bottom.] Then let's write the red section, let's write the yellow section. So that's how I organize it.

18 I feel like even on a longer paper &I've seen the argument in my head for so long& and I've **written on so many scraps of paper**, I tend to in **my class notes** and in **the margins of books**, in **the margins of napkins** you'll see *arguments that will eventually make it to the final paper*.

18 So by the time I'm ready to write, it's been written. So [it's a matter of just putting the necessary quotes] so the professor is happy and can see that I've read something and *arranging it in such a way that the professor can read and can see the argument* and it'll be a sound argument.

18 I'm a very brief writer. I have trouble going long. So that's what [I make my sheet of quotes] because otherwise, I won't make the length no matter how short the paper. So then I'll go through and say "Oh I need more quotes" just to reference someone else. And sometimes the quotes are . . . it's seamless and they work.

This example shows 9 of the 13 codes that I identified as aspects (subthemes) of the theme "writing a first draft." I used features of MS Word (bold, italic, color highlighting, and special non-numeric characters) to mark up (tag) pieces of the transcript. I made several passes through the data to notice all these subthemes. I was able to notice that more than one person had spoken about a theme more easily because the data were fixed as words on a (virtual) page. In practice, a researcher makes multiple passes when coding, as more and more textual data are collected and transcribed. Only after the third or fourth time that different participants talk about something does my mind conclude "that sounds so familiar because several people have said that." Using the "Find" feature in MS Word, I can quickly plug in a distinctive word or phrase and discover whether it is present in other transcripts. To practice free coding, complete the exercise below.

Practice Free Coding 1 Analyze the data below. The number in brackets simply keeps track of the text from 11 different participants. Ministers were asked to offer their suggestions for improving theological education. How many different themes do you find? Count something as a theme if three or more participants talked about it. Write down how many different participants voiced each theme.

- 1) Ministry with the poor. Downward mobility. Teaching the importance of sabbaticals.
- 2) Promote internships in congregations. Course materials should include the kinds of resources a minister uses weekly, so that those entering the ministry will have a useful pastoral library upon graduation. Train ministers how to prepare for and conduct premarital counseling, weddings, and funerals.
- 3) Do more practical orientation than theoretical.
- 4) Providing opportunities for hands-on ministry experience is a beneficial dimension to theological education, especially for those moving towards full-time congregational ministry. Another dimension seminaries could provide would be to facilitate self-care and inner life work. Seminary training should include space and resources for future ministers to deal with their issues (e.g., providing counseling sessions). Any way that a seminary can help create healthy ministers, not just knowledgeable ones, is a great benefit.
- 5) Personal devotional time solitude spiritual formation of the individuals.
- 6) More on the specifics of church leadership. Less theology - not bc it is unimportant, but bc it often overshadows the day in and day outs of leadership. More on team development, preaching practice, etc. Less “issue-driven” studies and more on the practical sides of ministry.
- 7) Expanded introduction to disciplines beyond theology, including business/organizational management, systems theory, marketing & PR. The area I’ve had to do the most work in developing is that of how to live/lead within an organizational system.
- 8) Ministry is so varied. I wonder if there is also space for something like rotations in med school, especially for full-time students. We often think we want to be one thing, and find God pulling us somewhere else.
- 9) Work placement. I highly value my MDiv experience. However, after working in a congregation for 3+ years and then working towards a DMin, I felt that the education received in my DMin was able to connect ministry and education in ways that my MDiv was unable to do so. If somehow a term where work placement could be part of the education process, students might be able to connect praxis and theology in healthy ways.
- 10) Use more practicing ministers to teach ministry classes like preaching, pastoral counseling, programing, and outreach. Also use co-teachers with professors and ministers.
- 11) I learned to lead outside the seminary setting. Perhaps this is the only way it can take place. I don’t remember many classes on the more practical aspects of congregational life. I do think this has been corrected in more recent years.

In this data set, I identified two themes. Several participants want a "more practical orientation" (2, 3, 4, 6, and 7). Another theme is increased field work or "hands-on ministry experience" (2, 4, 8, 9). Perhaps the suggestion of field work is simply a repeated example of a broader theme, making theological education less theoretical and doctrinal and more directly related to ministerial tasks. It's also possible to code the suggestion to have "practicing ministers" teach classes (10) under the umbrella category of making seminary education more practical. How do my themes compare to the ones that you found?

Building on the example that you just completed, use the text in the Databank called "Overarching Message" to complete a second free coding exercise. Please note that it will take some time for you to complete this exercise.

> **Practice Free Coding 2** Copy the Overarching Message Databank into a word processing program. At this point, you have two options: either print out the data and glue them to index cards, one response per card, or begin to code them in your document. Read through the paragraphs a couple of times, and then begin making judgments about themes that you discover. If you are using the card method, sort the cards into the needed number of stacks, one stack per theme. If you are using a word processor, make text for the first theme italicized and text for the second theme underlined. If there is a third theme, tag text for that theme in brackets [like this]. Write down how many different participants voiced each theme.

Here's what I expect that you found. There are two themes: one called something like "community" and the other "professional preparation." A total of eleven participants named the theme "community"; fifteen participants named the theme "professional preparation." In addition, eight participants named *both* themes. You may also have concluded that two participants that said the seminary did not promote any specific dominant or overarching message and that four others named another message. In principle, coders who understand how seminaries in North America go about their task of theological education would come to very similar conclusions using this set of data.

> **Thought Problem** Why would different coders come to very similar conclusions about the themes voiced in the "Overarching Message" Databank? (This is not a trick question.) If you found different themes than the author did, why do you think you did so?

Coding Using Qualitative Data Analysis Software

Many software packages are available to take some of the tediousness out of coding—commonly known as qualitative data analysis (QDA) software. The list below provides three examples. The basic way that QDA software works is that the program keeps track of information about participants (such as religious affiliation or age) and maps it to participant's data (e.g., an interview transcript). The analyst creates codes and subcodes as she wishes. The process of tagging a few lines of text with a code is a matter of highlighting blocks of text and clicking on the appropriate code. The analyst (researcher) can decide to change the name of a code, and the updated code is automatically attached to all relevant text. The software can also tell you how many times a code has been assigned. A researcher can grab all text

that has been assigned a given code and export it as a separate document. This feature is extremely useful when you are looking for particularly vivid quotations to use in a write-up. Because the software matches information about each individual participant with text associated with them, the analyst can quickly determine if, for instance, a given theme is voiced by male participants rather than female participants—provided that the researcher has collected that data point from participants. The programs listed below enable researchers to code text files and video files. Thus, a researcher could digitally record an event (for instance, a Bible study), upload it into the software, and then examine and code themes within the software platform.

Software for Coding Text

- **Dedoose** (*dedoose.com*) is a web-based tool. Several researchers may access and code data. Designed by a social psychologist. Pricing: monthly fee.
- **NVivo** (*qurinernantional.com*) is client-based. There are two packages plus an auto-transcription module. Pricing: perpetual license costing more than $1,000. Students are eligible to try out this software for a free trial period.
- **Transana** (*transana.com*) is client-based. There are basic, professional, and multi-user packages. Pricing: basic (more than one computer) costs less than $200.

Several websites are devoted to keeping track of QDA software packages. For instance, the Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching at Grand Canyon University web page discusses software for qualitative research in far greater detail than I do here. Because software changes and software companies go out of business, it is important to use current information when deciding about purchasing software. Using QDA software will clearly save time in large-scale projects, especially those involving several people in the analysis of data. The downsides are cost and the time that it takes to learn how to use the tools. The coding process is conceptually the same whether the researcher uses index cards, magic markers, or software.

Excursus: Analysis, Coding, Reading, and Interpreting Texts

Before proceeding, I want to ask the reader to reflect on the similarities and differences between the kind of close reading of texts that students learn how to do in seminary education and the kind of reading that social scientists do of textual data under a variety of names: documentary analysis, coding, or thematic analysis. Theological education has as one of its major tasks teaching students to slow down reading so that they begin to worry about such things as the general and the specific, the literal layer and metaphorical layers, what the author intended for a text to mean and how the text was received by multiple audiences over centuries. In the seminary world, these tools are given such names as exegesis (especially the task of getting at the original meaning of a biblical text), interpretation, and hermeneutics. Qualitative researchers schooled in anthropology and sociology generally do not think that the work that they do is hermeneutical in nature because, among other reasons, the founders of these disciplines did not study literary theory. As a theological student or working pastor, the idea of coding data may set your head spinning. If that is the case, I urge you to think about the task as something like asking exegetical questions of a passage of scripture: Who said/wrote this? What was the context? How do the words and ideas expressed here

compare with others? Coding data is roughly analogous to exegesis. Interpreting data is the researcher's effort at hermeneutics. (For a brief introduction to hermeneutics, see Mantzavinos 2020.) If you have learned how to "give a close reading" of a biblical or theological text, you have the capacity to learn how to code texts as a practical theologian or a social scientist.

Summarizing Data

Coding interview data, I have argued, takes focus, time, and requires multiple passes over transcript data to make sure that you aren't leaving important ideas out because of simple exhaustion. At some point, you need to take a deep breath and regain perspective on what participants are telling you. A helpful way to step back from the details of your text is to create tables that summarize tentative themes and subthemes. For instance, in a study that I conducted, I asked professors about what it is like to be a minister serving a congregation. Participants at several schools identified a theme called "Equipping," defined as the ways that ministers identify the gifts and talents that members have and how ministers cultivate them. After coding the data for subthemes, I summarized the findings by creating a table with simple counts of how many times a subtheme was voiced by participants. The table below shows the results and some examples of participant discourse for each subtheme.

Table 8.5 — Equipping: Subthemes

Subtheme	Frequency	Examples of Text from Participants ("Actual Participant Data")
Encouragement	10	1. "The pastor is an equipper." 2. ". . . an encourager for persons that really need help believing that they have something to contribute."
Talent Spotting	8	1. "You see latent gifts that could be cultivated." 2. "You hear a young person who can sing and connect them to the choir or to the organist." 3. "You see a young person who's studious and good in math, maybe connect them to the church accountant."
Growth in Discipleship	8	1. "In a lot of Methodist churches, you not only join the congregation, but you join a Sunday School class that does some of that work of faith formation." 2."The pastoral role is to cultivate and lead those opportunities for people to grow."

It is virtuous to summarize the frequency of themes and subthemes for several reasons. First of all, if you rely on memory you are likely to recall what the last couple of interviewees told you, the ideas that you agree with (we are all human), or the ideas of the loudest or most eloquent participant. The rest disappears. Because of the discipline of counting, you can determine what the most common ideas were without being defeated by your memory. Second,

by putting all the names of subthemes into the same document, you can make determinations about whether some of them are synonymous (in which case they should be combined into one) or form aspects of one common idea that you, so far, have failed to notice. In the data shown in the table (above), for instance, I initially identified three subthemes. After further thought, it seems that the subthemes "Encouragement" and "Growth in Discipleship" were actually about the same main idea (subtheme). In that case, it makes sense to combine them into a single unit, which I show in the table below.

Table 8.6 — Equipping: Revised Subthemes

Subtheme	Frequency	Examples of Text from Participants ("Actual Participant Data")
Encouraging Growth	18	1. "The pastor is an equipper." 2. ". . . an encourager for persons that really need help believing that they have something to contribute." 3. "The pastoral role is to cultivate and lead those opportunities for people to grow."
Talent Spotting	8	1. "You see latent gifts that could be cultivated." 2. "You hear a young person who can sing and connect them to the choir or to the organist." 3. "You see a young person who's studious and good in math, maybe connect them to the church accountant."

Notice that the newly discovered subtheme ("Encouraging Growth") is now revealed to be more than twice as commonly voiced as the subtheme "Talent Spotting."

What Counts as a Subtheme?

In our discussion of coding, we have noticed that general themes frequently contain discernable subthemes. A careful researcher will make multiple passes over transcripts to find, if possible, codes to attach to almost all sentences (or paragraphs) of the transcript. At some point, the researcher needs to take stock to determine if there is enough text from enough different participants to be counted as a subtheme. When making such judgements, researchers face a tradeoff between variety and simplicity. A researcher could only report a subtheme if most participants had something to say about it. Such an analysis would be accurate but might consistently leave out the voices of a considerable number of participants. At the other extreme, discovering too many subthemes seems as if the researcher has done no analysis at all. In the world of focus groups, one practice has been to use the language of "all, most/some/a few" when reporting results (Krueger and Casey 2000, 141). Even using these levels of frequency, the researcher needs to determine how many voices count as "some" versus "a few." To think about the challenges of establishing a baseline for distinguishing between a subtheme and an unremarkable piece of discourse, work on the following exercise.

Exercise: How Low Should You Go? Read the following rationales for setting a lowest frequency for counting a set of coded text as a theme or subtheme. What impact do these choices make? In this imaginary study, the researcher interviews twenty-five different participants; sixteen are men and nine are women. The researcher discovered seven themes that everyone talked about to some extent.

- I decided that if six or more talked about one aspect of a theme, that should count as a subtheme. If almost 25 percent of participants talk about something, it is important.
- I decided that if eight or more talked about one aspect of a theme, that should count as a subtheme. If almost one-third of participants talk about something, it is important.
- Because I am concerned with gender in my study, I decided that if 2 women or 4 men talked about one aspect of a theme, it counts as a subtheme. If a quarter of participants of one gender voice a subtheme, it is important.

If you value variety in your analysis, you may be sympathetic with the first criterion—6 out of 25. Such a decision may produce more subthemes than the second criterion—8 out of 25. There is no hard and fast rule about setting the minimum frequency, so either of these is sensible in a small study. The third example draws attention to a real-world problem. If I am concerned in a study to compare the themes voiced by women with those voiced by men, I need to think about what happens if the study does not have equal numbers of participants. The solution proposed here notes a subtheme if it is voiced by 22 percent of female participants or 25 percent of the male participants.

Thought Problem Can you think of a study whose purpose would be well served by reporting only themes or subthemes voiced by most study participants?

Research Design and Data Analysis

As we discovered in chapter 2, a qualitative researcher makes important overall decisions at the beginning of a study. These decisions guide research questions and how data are collected. The design of the study also guides how researchers conduct their analysis of data. So far in this chapter, I have talked about coding in terms of discovering themes voiced by several participants rather than a single person. Such a tabulation makes sense if my research question is in the form of "What themes do participants voice about X?" Implicit is the assumption that my interest is about what is relatively common and uncommon across a group, consistent with my assumptions about group reality.

It is possible, however, that in my study I want to focus on individuals, perhaps how *individuals* change over time. In this case, my initial way of analyzing data could, in the first instance, focus on each individual as the unit of analysis. Consider a study designed around testing a Bible study curriculum for middle school students. The researcher wants to teach students about the biblical theme of hospitality. Let's posit the following research questions (RQs):

RQ 1. At the start of the study, what examples of hospitality in the Bible do participants know about?

RQ 2. After completing the researcher's Bible study curriculum, what examples of hospitality in the Bible do participants know about?

Given these research questions, it would be important to collect "before and after" data from each participant. Data for RQ 1 might be summarized like this:

Table 8.7 — Hypothetical Data, Research Question 1 (Start of Study)

Participant	Bible Stories Named	Number of Stories Named
1	Good Samaritan	1
2	Abram and Sarai welcoming angels; Good Samaritan; road to Emmaus	3
3	Prodigal son	1
4	Prodigal son; Good Samaritan	2
5	Innkeeper in Bethlehem	1

Because the researcher wants to focus on changes in individual participants, it would be important to keep track of which participants named which stories so that, at the second stage of data collection (after students were taught about hospitality in the Bible using the researcher's curriculum), responses could be mapped to the appropriate persons. Such data might look like the table below.

Table 8.8 — Hypothetical Data, Research Question 2 (after Participation in Training)

Participant	Bible Stories Named	Number of Stories Named	Change in Number of Stories Named
1	Good Samaritan; Prodigal son	2	1
2	Abram and Sarai welcoming angels; Good Samaritan; road to Emmaus; Innkeeper in Bethlehem; provision for widows in early Jerusalem church	5	2
3	Prodigal son	1	0
4	Prodigal son; Good Samaritan; widow sharing food with Elijah	3	1
5	Innkeeper in Bethlehem	1	0

In this data set, two participants (#3 and #5) named the same story as before, but no others. Three other participants named more examples of hospitality after taking part in the curriculum. It is therefore accurate to say that "most participants named more examples after completing the curriculum than before." This is a different kind of analytical summary than stating "Before

taking part, the participants named a total of eight (stories). After taking part, participants named 12 stories—an increase of 50 percent." Both sentences accurately reflect the data. The summary that notes both gains, losses, and no change may be more helpful if the researcher's concern is focused more on individual growth rather than the aggregate change. Thus, the researcher might write: "Two participants named the same number of hospitality stories after taking part in training as before; three named more stories."

Example: High-level Analysis and Summary of Data

I have argued that qualitative researchers need to be diligent about fixing the form of data, then coding data to discover key themes. I have further argued that researchers need to create summaries of data that are far less voluminous than the pages of transcribed interviews themselves. What do such summaries look like? In this section I give examples from my own research (Lincoln 2020). Consider summary 1 (below). It is a list of edited responses to the question "What are your suggestions for improving theological education?" All responses come from 35 graduates of one seminary in the study. Graduates could provide more than one suggestion. There were fifty-seven total responses.

Table 8.9 — Summary 1: A List with Frequencies

Response Theme	Number of Responses
Practical Dimensions of Ministry	15
Changing Church & World	7
Leadership	6
Word and Sacrament	5
Mission and Outreach	4
Spiritual Formation	4
Self-care	4
Working Pastors as Resources	3
Post-seminary Support	3
Seminary Can't Do It All	2
Anti-practical	2
Changing Who is Admitted to Seminary	2

In the raw data, respondents wrote a sentence or short paragraph expressing their views. For instance, one respondent said that theological education needed to do a better job of teaching the "'how to's' of daily ministry: How To Run a Session/Board Meeting, How To Counsel, How to Manage Conflict, How To Manage a Staff." Another wrote:

> The introductory classes I took were so based in theory and not in practicalities that they were all but useless. Everything I learned about care and teaching I learned through CPE, internships, and mentors. The balance of the required curriculum is a little off from the reality of congregational ministry.

Both responses are examples of data points that I coded under the general heading "Practical Dimensions of Ministry." When compiled as a list with frequencies, the summary helps the researcher to see not only that the most common response was "Practical Dimensions of Ministry" (meaning that seminaries should focus more on what one respondent called the "how to's of ministry"), but that this category of response was twice as popular as the next two suggestions. Two responses that I coded as "Anti-practical" (that is, they expressed the idea that seminary education should be a sheltered time of deep theological contemplation without worrying too much about the practice of ministry) might be re-coded under the "Practical Dimensions of Ministry" heading as a dissenting subtheme. Some of the other responses that I coded separately ("Leadership," "Word and Sacrament," "Mission and Outreach") might also fall under the more general heading of "Practical." The table below shows this reshuffling and tabulation.

Table 8.10 — Summary 2: Revised List with Frequencies

Response Theme	Number of Responses
Practical Dimensions of Ministry	32
Changing Church & World	7
Spiritual Formation	4
Self-care	4
Working Pastors as Resources	3
Post-seminary Support	3
Seminary Can't Do It All	2
Changing Who is Admitted to Seminary	2

Notice how this second layer of analysis shows how important the practical aspects of ministry are, in the minds of respondents. The number of responses increases from 15 to 32. Thus, the value of generating summaries of data goes beyond simply condensing large amounts of text. The summaries make it possible to continue your analysis and see the connections between various themes voiced by your participants. In other words, producing summaries is part of the continuous comparative technique of analysis.

Now, try your hand at using summaries to continue data analysis. Examine the themes and definitions below. They are derived from the same study as Example 1, above. These data come from graduates of different seminaries. Re-organize the themes so that there are both general themes and some subthemes (categories that logically relate to a more general practice or idea).

Table 8.11 — Exercise: To improve Theological Education Seminaries Should . . .

Theme	Definition
Liturgy	Teach more about how ministers lead worship services.
Changing Church & World	Recognize that both congregational life and our culture are rapidly changing.
Leadership	Teach students how to motivate congregants to follow a shared vision.
Word and Sacrament	Teach students how to teach, preach, and conduct worship services.
Mission and Outreach	Teach students how to help congregants preach the gospel and care about their local communities and the world.
Spiritual Formation	Shape the inner lives of seminarians, not just teach how to do tasks.
Preaching	Teach students how to prepare and deliver sermons.
Self-care	Encourage students to learn how to balance life and work responsibilities.
Community Engagement	Give students skills to work with political and civic leaders.
Administration	Train students to manage volunteers, programs, and money.
Pastoral Care and Counseling	Train students to accompany congregants during difficult times.
Conflict Resolution	Train students to deal with differences of opinion in a congregation.

One cluster of themes might be nested under “Word and Sacrament”: “Preaching and Liturgy.” The themes “Spiritual Formation” and “Self-care” also seem to be related. It is possible that these themes could be put together in a way that honors the underlying data. What about “Leadership” and “Conflict Resolution”? Surely a good leader knows how to work with conflict. The themes “Mission and Outreach” and “Community Engagement” also seem to be getting at a similar goal: attention to the community in which a congregation is situated. One theme focuses on what a future minister needs to know to motivate congregants; the other on what she needs to know to work fruitfully with community leaders. A revised analysis of these themes might look like the summary below. The table has consolidated twelve themes from the preceding exercise into five.

Table 8.12 — Improving Theological Education, Take 2: Seminaries should . . .

Theme	Definition
Word and Sacrament	Teach students how to teach, preach, and conduct worship services.
Pastoral Care and Counseling	Train students to accompany congregants during difficult times.
Leadership	Teach students how to motivate congregants to follow a shared vision. Important aspects of leadership include reading culture, conflict resolution, community engagement, and a desire to share the gospel.
Administration	Train students to manage volunteers, programs, and money.
Self-care	Encourage students to learn how to balance life and work responsibilities and care of their inner lives.

I hope that you agree that there is logic at work in the choices that I made to consolidate some of the themes. How do my revised themes compare to yours? In your own study, you should review your raw data and data summaries to make sure that you are not losing important nuance in consolidations that you make. All such analytical decisions are exercises of your informed judgement. In this revised summary, for instance, the category "Leadership" consists of several skills. At this point, the reader might feel some discomfort at how I have suggested that researchers analyze data. What started out as heartfelt responses, vivid with detail (albeit cluttered with the hemming and hawing of spoken language), have been transcribed and broken down into analytical categories (themes and subthemes). While this is an important step in data reduction, there are also losses. Somewhere, years ago, I read about a comedian who had taken a speed reading course. He said: "It was very helpful. I read the novel *War and Peace* in a half an hour! It's about Russia." There is a limit to the helpfulness of pithy summaries.

Using Quotations as Persuasive Evidence

Identifying Vivid Direct Discourse

Researchers should use direct quotations drawn from interviews to their best advantage. The time to attend to outstanding turns of phrase is during data analysis rather than thinking of them as ornaments dropped into the write-up of your research. To anticipate some of the discussion in chapter 10 (writing up results), the report about your research project will most likely not include long extracts of your interviews. Most reports require succinctness in stating your findings. Nevertheless, quotations have communicative power.

If you have followed the analytical techniques discussed in this chapter, you began with transcripts containing participant responses to your interview questions just as respondents said them out loud during interviews. You then coded interviews to find key themes and subthemes. You may also have pulled transcripts from several interviewees apart and pasted

together a series of quotations on the same subject (e.g., the same subtheme). The box below shows an example of such a compilation. The quotes come from seminary students that I interviewed for my dissertation. They were asked to talk about the call to ministry. Several talked about how their call developed over time. The gray highlighting shows the specific phrases that I tagged (coded) as examples of the subtheme "slow to develop."

Call to Ministry as Slowly Developing

101 God's been *revealing it slowly*: where my strengths are, where my weaknesses are, where my passions are. . . I totally believed that that's what God had shaped me and wired me for. It wasn't glamorous. It was *just consistently throughout my life*.

102 *I first started discerning my call* when I was in college. I was 18 and I was on the mission field. I realized that I enjoyed being on the mission field more than being in school or anything else.

103 My call has *happened over a lifetime*. My family was always heavily involved with church, so I always felt called to participate and be in leadership. I also took part in youth groups and camps. I loved it. In high school, I became an elder. I participated at church and at presbytery level, synod, and General Assembly. I went to college to do a biochemistry degree. I was going to go to medical school. *As I got closer to taking the MCAT and applying to medical school, it didn't feel right.*

104 I grew up, born and raised in a Presbyterian church. I was going to college for a digital media degree. The further I went in my program, *I knew I wasn't feeling complete internally.* I didn't feel that I was doing what God wanted me to do in life. *For quite a few months, I prayed about what direction God would like me to go,* where God could best use my talents and gifts and abilities. That's when I felt called to ministry.

202 *When I really started feeling the call,* it had been years since I'd been in church. We all joined the Presbyterian church in Big Spring. I worked most Sundays. I began to feel being called to go back to church. You get that little feeling in your head. It's just like somebody's in the pick with you talking to you. I finally decided to start back to church. Not long after that, I got Saturdays and Sundays off. *The longer I was in church, the more I was asked to do. I realized that I was supposed to do some form of ministry.*

203 *I didn't join a church for noble reasons. I joined because I wanted my daughter to be in the Mother's Day Out program.* I was baptized along with my two children. I was about thirty. *By then, I had developed a faith.* I felt that I was part of a faith family. Once I felt included, I was sopped up into the leadership of the church. *As my service grew, people said I should be in the church's leadership.* My husband thought that he had a call to ministry. We went to Discovery Weekend. A couple of the professors said, why don't you come, too.

204 My call was like a living being, it *grows*. During college I was involved in a mission and did that. I traveled a lot (Africa, Europe, Asia). Then I went back to Asia, and saw my sister in San Francisco. Some friends invited me to Austin and we looked around UT, and then I saw the sign for WTS. I started at MATS. I talked to some pastors back in Korea, they were becoming very enthusiastic about the need for women ministers. I transferred to MDiv program. *I concluded that the Korean church is not ready for women ministers. Then I realized I have the heart for the Korean church here in the States.*

> **207** I look at call in the context of my marriage. My husband and I were both called to ministry. *It wasn't a discrete kind of thing.*
>
> **208** *When I went on an Emmaus Walk* a year after Dad passed away, just after I was laid off. I asked not to get rid of the memories but to get rid of the hurt. And *within my head I heard a voice that said, Stand up and talk for me.* The next two or three years my sponsor and I started and set up a lay speaker program. The pastors actually used the speakers. *After a year or two I kept hearing the voice* as if this wasn't enough. *I did more research reading Luther and others.* I thought that my gift is engineering. I was reading Barkley one time and he said that Jesus started his ministry at thirty. But that's not the thirty of today. That's like sixty today. Jesus had a career before. *So I decided to do the ministry route.*

These quotations from nine different participants can be summarized by saying "Several participants said that their sense of call to ministry developed slowly over time." Notice that this laconic summary lacks the punch of saying "Once I felt included [in a congregation], I was sopped up into the leadership of the church," or "My husband and I were both called to ministry. It wasn't a discrete kind of thing." One method for keeping track of especially vivid quotations is to tag them in your data compilations. This can be done easily by putting a tag (such as: [GREAT QUOTE]) at the beginning or end of the quote in your word processing document. You can then use the "find" function of your software to look at the vivid quotes. If you are using qualitative data analysis software, you can create a tag and pin it to especially appealing quotations. If you tag vivid quotations, you will easily be able to find them to include in your final report as examples of themes.

Synthetic Quotations

Another approach to using quotations effectively is to create ***synthetic quotations***. Northcutt and McCoy (2004, 314–22) advocate this approach as a way of vividly communicating what several participants in a group told researchers in a concise way. A synthetic quotation is a composite, made by weaving together direct quotations from several participants into a concentrated, vivid paragraph. The synthetic quotation below draws on the texts voiced by participants in Table 8.13.

Call to Ministry as Slowly Developing: Synthetic Quotation

> God's been revealing to me slowly where my strengths are, where my weaknesses are, where my passions are. I totally believe that God had shaped me and wired me for ministry. My call wasn't glamorous. It was consistent throughout my life. My call has happened over a lifetime. My family was always heavily involved with church, so I always felt called to participate and be in leadership. I also took part in youth groups and camps. I loved it. In high school, I became an elder. I participated in the congregation and at presbytery level, synod, and General Assembly. I look at the call in the context of my marriage. My husband and I were both called to ministry. It wasn't a discrete thing.

In writing a synthetic quotation, the researcher is exercising power to recast the experiences of individuals into a lively representation of part of those individual's experiences. The ethical and artistic challenge in creating such quotations is to remain faithful to what

participants said and meant. In a final report, the researcher will tell readers when quotations are the researcher's composites.

To practice writing synthetic quotations, read the texts below. They are quotations from eleven different participants about how their call to ministry was a kind of intuition (i.e., something that they just felt or knew deep inside themselves). After reading the text, try your hand at creating one or more synthetic quotations. Your synthetic quotation should provide the evidence to follow a sentence like: "Participants described their calls to ministry as a kind of individual intuition." It will take a little time to shape the quotation so that it sounds elegant. Don't be afraid to rearrange the words from various participants. The order in which I report them here is arbitrary (by participant number).

Exercise: Call to Ministry as Intuition

- **101** You have this feeling when something's right for you. I knew I wanted to be a pastor.
- **103** But I knew I was being pulled towards the pastorate.
- **104** For quite a few months, I prayed about where God could best use my talents and gifts and abilities. That's when I felt called to ministry. I felt tugged to go into the church.
- **105** Professors here are open to talk about call, but I think it's an individual thing. It's not necessarily part of the curriculum to help us find our call. It's an underlying issue.
- **202** I began to feel being called to go back to church. You get that little feeling in your head. It's just like somebody's in the pick with you talking to you.
- **203** It was a combination of the community's call and my sense of God's urging.
- **204** I had a small specific call a long time ago. God called me to do his work.
- **205** I don't know exactly where I'm going to end up. I figure God will speak up again when it's time for me to know. God has shown a propensity to do that.
- **206** There is a desire. I love academics. It's almost too good to be true.
- **207** I knew I felt a very strong leading. I've never veered from that. I just take it a day at a time. I just trust God to direct.
- **208** Within my head I heard a voice that said, "Stand up and talk for me."

When I analyzed these data, I produced two synthetic quotations. Each vividly addresses two distinct themes in the quotations.

Call to Ministry as an Individual Intuition: Synthetic Quotation

> You have this feeling when something's right for you. I knew I wanted to be a pastor. I began to feel called to go back to church. You get that little feeling in your head. It's just like somebody's in the pickup truck with you talking to you. Professors here are open to talk about call, but I think it's an individual thing. I knew I was being pulled towards the pastorate. I felt a very strong leading. There is a desire. It's almost too good to be true.

Call to Ministry as an Intuition Coming from God: Synthetic Quotation

> For quite a few months, I prayed about where God could best use my talents and gifts and abilities. That's when I felt called to ministry. I felt tugged to go into the church. My call was a combination of the community's call and my sense of God's urging. God called me to do His work. I don't know exactly where I'm going to end up. I figure God will speak up again when it's time for me to know. God has shown a propensity to do that. Within my head I heard a voice that said, "Stand up and talk for me." I just trust God to direct.

How do my quotations compare to yours? Creating composite quotations is an art. Two researchers could take a set of unedited quotations and produce diverse synthetic quotations. The basis for judging whether such highly distilled products are good is two-fold: First, do they faithfully convey what participants said? Second, are the composites compelling? Your purpose in spending time to produce such quotations is to help persuade readers of your reports that you captured what it was like for your study participants.

> **Thought Problem** What tensions exist between faithfully reporting what most study participants told you about a theme and reporting vivid examples of direct discourse?

Do You See What I See? Enlisting Others to Comment on Your Data Summaries

One of the charges leveled against qualitative research is that the data are like a Rorschach test image. The meaningful patterns that you see in the data are simply a reflection of your own ideas and hopes rather than a "detached" analysis of what participants said or did. Moreover, because of the researcher's intersectionality and positionality, even a skilled researcher is liable to miss some subtleties in a set of data or make silly interpretations. To give one example of regional speech variation in the United States, in the American south the expression "Bless his heart" is a common idiom for noting that a person is clueless about something; it is not a pious wish. An uninformed researcher might miscode text because she or he was not aware of how the idiom is used.

As a check on the researcher's inevitable limitations, there are two commonly used techniques: the use of a consultant and inviting study participants to comment on summaries and conclusions (member checking). In your own context, a consultant may be a knowledgeable fellow student who is willing to review data summaries and have a conversation with you about them. Instructors teaching courses of qualitative research may build-in such discussions in the design of assignments. A fresh set of eyes is helpful because the researcher becomes immersed in her own data. She may be highly confident that she has found key themes ("I know what's going on here!") or experience periods of feeling overwhelmed by data ("I've looked at this stuff for two weeks. I know less now than when I started!"). Engaging in a conversation with a consultant forces the researcher to explain what the researcher sees in the data, even when those patterns have already become too obvious or mundane to talk about. A consultant might also be able to confirm the researcher's initial interpretations of data (i.e., a researcher's explanations for why the data turned out as they did). In large-scale

qualitative research studies, it is highly desirable to have a team of persons analyze data to take advantage of the various kinds of personal history and expertise that each researcher has. For instance, a male researcher conducting a study with female participants might not notice, or might notice but not understand, some aspects of the data that would leap off the page to a knowledgeable female researcher. In the context of a final doctoral project, the researcher's advisor or another DMin student may serve as such a consultant and provide feedback to the researcher at several points during the data analysis process.

In Lincoln and Guba's (1985) approach to qualitative research, the design of a study builds in extensive conversation about preliminary findings and conclusions with study participants. Those who are sharing their experiences and opinions in the study are experts on their own experience. The purpose of such a check is "to obtain confirmation that the report has captured the data as constructed by the informants" (236). Action research (an approach that builds the involvement of participants into the design and the procedures of the study) also builds in cycles of comment by study participants to ensure that the process involves mutual learning and leads to practical conclusions that improve the lives of participants rather than reflecting an outsider's agenda (Murray 2014, 588). For instance, government-sponsored researchers seeking to manage a wild area in El Salvador engaged local residents to conduct an inventory of plant life and design a sustainable plan to use products and promote tourism. This approach pairs the expertise of researchers with the knowledge and values of persons directly affected by the findings of the study (Valencia, Riera, and Juncà 2012). Researchers using liberationist or project approaches commonly use some form of member checking.

In a study that uses a series of interviews to collect data from individuals, the design itself provides opportunities for a researcher to ask participants to elaborate on comments from previous interviews. As we saw in chapter 5, Seidman's (2013, 20–1) three-interview series builds opportunities to put participant stories into a richer context than one-shot interviewing. Similarly, Spradley's (1979/2016, 120–31) technique of asking both descriptive and structural questions of key informants leverages the knowledge of informants to guide the researcher's analysis. In other words, asking clarifying questions is a form of member checking that helps the researcher understand the full meaning of the words of study participants.

Reminder: Managing Interview Data

Researchers need to manage data carefully throughout the course of their qualitative research study. Raw data may be collected using a pencil-and-paper questionnaire, a consent form, and sound files recorded on a phone. A researcher needs to establish a chain of evidence showing that participant 001 is the same person that signed a consent form, completed a specific questionnaire about her background, and then was interviewed by you on two different occasions. One reason to manage your data well is to honor each individual's contribution to your study. Another reason for good data management is that you may need to review participant 001's background questionnaire once your initial analysis of textual data is complete. Was she a woman? What was her church affiliation? The only way that you can answer questions like these, which may shed light on why this participant's responses were so different from those of others in your study, is to be disciplined about data management throughout the research cycle.

Are We There Yet? Data Analysis in the Research Process

By the time a researcher has coded and summarized data, she has moved through a complex series of actions. She has successfully gotten access to participants. She has collected interview data. She has taken measures to protect the data from loss by making multiple copies of files. She has protected the identity of participants by de-linking personal identifying information. She has paid the bills for transcribing data or other expenses related to data collection. She has spent hours coding data to determine key themes and subthemes or to figure out how the pieces of a complex process (e.g., congregational decision making) fit together. Completion of these activities put the researcher in a position to engage in the most exciting part of qualitative research: finding meanings in data and looking for reasons why participants said what they said or did what you observed. This is the task of interpretation. In the next chapter, we discuss how researchers move from data analysis to sense making.

CHAPTER 8: KEY POINTS

- » It is necessary to fix the form of data to preserve them and make them available for analysis. Typically, fixing the form of data means transcribing interviews and handwritten field notes and transferring short answers from questionnaires into spreadsheets.
- » The first step in analysis is to sort pieces of talk (now transcribed into text) into categories. This process is called coding.
- » Analytical categories are not innocent or obvious. Categories always reflect the cultural background, values, beliefs, and positionality of the researcher.
- » Coding is an iterative process. Give yourself enough time when coding to review your transcripts several times.
- » Sometimes researchers look for patterns in data related to a theory chosen at the start of the study. This procedure is called coding to theory.
- » Researchers may also code data based on categories that arise from the body of data itself. This procedure is called free text coding.
- » A theological doctrine chosen at the start of a study may form the basis of coding.
- » Researchers create synthetic quotations to provide accurate, vivid examples of what a group of participants said.
- » Summarizing the frequency of themes, creating summaries, and noting pertinent quotations aids analysis of data and shortens the time it takes to write up findings in formal reports.
- » It is a good research practice to have a consultant, instructor, or study participants comment on data summaries. Asking others to review your work prevents errors of interpretation and makes your final report more credible to readers.
- » Back up your data and all your working documents. They are precious.

CHAPTER 9

Making Sense, Making Meanings

Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met.

– Martin Luther King, Jr., civil rights activist, speech at Stanford University, April 14, 1967 (Smith 2020)

MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN

– Slogan on cap for Donald J. Trump's presidential campaign, 2016

For wisdom, listen not to me but to the Word, and know that all is one.

– Heraclitus (2001, 5), philosopher, *Fragments* 2

As we have worked through the steps of the qualitative research process so far, we began by posing a set of research questions about a topic of interest. We then discussed how to recruit participants for a study (chapter 4) and how to collect data via group and individual interviews, questionnaires, and observation (chapters 5–7). In chapter 8, we discussed good practices for reducing a voluminous amount of data into refined themes and subthemes. All our work has been done in service of answering the research questions that govern our study. Our challenge as researchers has continually been to be faithful stewards of what participants told us—in other words, we have followed rigorous procedures for determining what participants have wanted to say, without overlaying our own ideas about their words (or correcting data to reflect what study participants should have said). In chapter 9, we now move to the task of teasing out what participants mean or why they said what they said. This is the task of interpretation.

The three epigraphs at the beginning of this chapter are a starting point for pondering the difference between what is said or observed and what is meant by words and actions. As I began writing this chapter, several cities in the United States saw crowds of protesters raise their voices in response to the killing of George Floyd—an African American man—by a Minneapolis police officer. For several days, protesters were confronted by armed police. There was looting and arson. In Minneapolis, a police precinct was burned. In Seattle, protesters occupied a small part of the city, evicting the police and declaring a Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone. One part of the quote by Dr. Martin King, Jr. was voiced repeatedly: "a riot is the language of the unheard." Dr. King's fuller quotation provides explanatory context. He condemns rioting but also specifies who and what was "unheard"—the plight of poor African Americans in the context of peculiarly American promises of freedom and justice for everyone. The fuller quotation helps readers understand the meaning of the more ear-catching

phrase, "the language of the unheard." Without explanation, our second epigraph, Donald Trump's MAGA slogan—Make America Great Again—raises numerous interpretive questions: When was America great? In what sense was America great? How has America lost its greatness? And what would re-established greatness look like? No doubt, readers of this book may provide their own answers to these questions. What a political text says on its face and what it means to readers (not to mention a purported author) are not identical. Finally, the quote about the unity of all things by Heraclitus—a Greek philosopher active ca. 500 BCE—is open to multiple interpretations because of its intentionally aphoristic genre and his advocacy for ideas that other ancient Greeks (and later commentators) found paradoxical at best (Graham 2019). A Christian reader might wonder about this Word (λογος) because it resonates with the opening of the Gospel of John ("In the beginning was the Word"). Each of these three short texts are sentences that say something; each of them needs interpretation to make sense to hearers/readers. In other words, their meaning is not obvious.

As you find patterns in your data, you will want to do your best to make sense of them. You will want to push beyond the facts to the reasons behind the facts or how the facts matter. As a ministry student/qualitative researcher, why isn't it enough simply to summarize your findings? Shouldn't we let people "speak for themselves" without editorial filters that add layers of our own prejudices? One reason to engage in interpretation lies in the promises made in the design of a study. If a researcher has committed herself to the research arc of writing research questions about a topic of significance and collecting data that relate meaningfully to them, then the job isn't done until the researcher shows the connection between the questions and the answers. A second reason lies in the very nature of putting together a written account that involves sifting, pondering, and selection from various sources. As John van Maanen (1988, 30) put it, "an ethnography may be crammed full of facts but also conveys an argument." To put it another way, what your findings mean and the difference that they might make in the world is not obvious, any more than a parable of Jesus or a philosopher's laconic aphorism has a firm, unambiguous meaning. As a qualitative researcher, you create knowledge both by creating data about your research topic and by making interpretations in conversation with other research. Finding meaning in your data is perhaps the most creative aspect of conducting qualitative research. To use a rough analogy with writing a sermon, data analysis is like exegesis of a biblical text. Getting at reasons that explain causes for why participants said what they said is like the hermeneutical move from canonical words to the situations of contemporary hearers.

This chapter focuses on making sense of your research findings. First, the researcher interprets her findings in conversation with previous research. Second, the researcher might interpret findings using a theory—either a recognized theory in the social sciences or a viewpoint drawn from practical theology. The researcher might posit her own grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Third, the researcher might employ what Northcutt and McCoy (2004) call an analysis of timbre—the emotional tone displayed in themes. Fourth, because this book is written for ministry students, this chapter discusses how the researcher's theological commitments (and other values) appropriately shape interpretation of your study. Finally, we will explore how interpretation leads the researcher to suggest implications of a study for other ministry settings or ministerial practice, often called the generalizability of findings. Exploring generalizability offers another opportunity to rehearse the difference between quantitative and qualitative research.

Interpretation via Comparison with Previous Research

In some cases, researchers have thought about research findings so much during data collection (which may take weeks or months) and analysis (using coding and the constant comparative method) that interpretations of findings seem to leap out of the data. However, in other cases, the researcher may have compiled results that seem to be mute. Fear not. If you have gone through the research design process outlined in this book, you can be helped as you ponder the meaning of your results by returning to your statement of the research problem and literature review. As noted in chapter 3, in your literature review you have explained why your topic is significant and how it has already been studied. One of the most important questions to ask about the results of your study is: How do these findings compare with what other researchers found? Are they consistent? Are they dissimilar in some ways? Consider the examples in the exercise below, based on a hypothetical study of "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) persons and the actual study conducted by Linda Mercadante. Answer the interpretive question: How do my hypothetical findings compare with Mercadante?

Thought Exercise: My Findings and Previous Findings

- Linda Mercadante found that almost all of the SBNR persons that she interviewed asserted that all of the world's religions are seeking after the same universal truth but have failed to reach that truth (Mercadante 2014, 81–5). In your study of SBNR persons, you found a similar result—eight out of ten of your study participants voiced the views that Mercadante found.
- Dr. Mercadante also found that some SBNR persons reported that religious leaders stressed that belief was a matter of personal choice, even if it meant leaving the Christian tradition (Mercadante 2014, 78). In your study, three participants did not report that they had discussions about spirituality or belief with religious leaders. The seven who did stated that the leaders they spoke with stressed that belief was more complicated than an individual coming to her own conclusions. Religious leaders told them that God's revelation of Godself in Jesus Christ should challenge and shape all religious beliefs.

The findings of our hypothetical study do not completely align with the Mercadante study. Our study findings were consistent with her finding that the vast majority of SBNR persons think that all of the world's religions strive to find the same truth but fail. Our findings differ from Mercadante's finding that religious leaders emphasized the importance of choice when it comes to believing. While the first finding leaves little new to think about, the second finding gives the researcher something to ponder—why did your findings differ from those of Mercadante? What was it about the religious leaders or religious upbringing of study participants that explains why your findings differ? Comparison with the findings of previous research helps the researcher think about the meaning of her own findings by inviting a return to analysis of her data. For instance, in what religious tradition were study participants of the hypothetical study reared? If they were nurtured in "conservative" Catholic or evangelical churches as opposed to "liberal" mainline Protestant churches, then a plausible explanation for the difference between the hypothetical findings and what Mercadante found is that conservative churches uphold an orthodoxy that gives central place to the distinctiveness of Jesus. In other words, in this case the explanation that makes sense of the data is theological (and Christological).

Let's think through another example of where research findings differ from published literature. A recent study of mine (Lincoln 2020) compared what it is like to be a minister from the viewpoints of ministers themselves (i.e., practitioners) and those who train persons for ministry (seminary professors). Read the text in the box below. Then, ask yourself: what accounts for the difference between what ministers said about the theme "Equipping" (defined as the ways that pastors discern and cultivate the gifts and talents of members) and what seminary professors and the published literature said about the theme?

> **Exercise: Ministers as Equippers** In the study of five seminaries, seminary professors at three schools identified the theme "Equipping" as one of the themes of the everyday world of ministers. In the literature of pastoral leadership, the subject is treated at length (such as Woodward 2012). Graduates from the same schools serving as ministers were asked about their everyday world. No set of graduates identified Equipping as a theme.

The example of "Equipping" was one of several in this study in which seminary professors thought that it worked one way but graduates in ministry said that it worked rather differently. There is a striking lack of agreement between what professors thought and what ministers thought. One possible explanation is the Ivory Tower explanation—professors are so busy being academic (thinking great thoughts) that they are out of touch with the work of ministers. I rejected that theory (i.e., explanation) because most of the professors in the study had been full-time ministers themselves. Another possible explanation is that congregational life has changed between the time when professors were ministers and the time of the study. At one school, the median length of time that a professor had been a full-time faculty member was more than 22 years. I daresay that many aspects of congregational life and ministerial work are not the same today as they were two decades ago. A third possible explanation goes back to ideas of intersectionality and positionality introduced in chapter 2. Ministers serving congregations are "closer" to the phenomenon of congregational ministry than professors are. It is as if the ministers are swimming inside the fishbowl and professors (and the researcher!) are on the outside looking in. Since professors are frequently teaching the basic elements of ministry (and theology and biblical studies), those topics are on their minds. I would consider myself a poor professor of pastoral leadership, for instance, if I did not talk about how ministers should identify and nurture the talents of congregants.

Perhaps you came up with other possible explanations (remember, your ideas count as a theory) for this research finding. My point is not to come to a definite conclusion that accounts for the difference. Rather, I want you to acquire the habit of noticing that there is a difference between *stating* a research finding that conforms to or dissents from other research findings and *explaining* the reason(s) for your finding.

Below is a third exercise. In this case, the findings of a study are consistent with results from an earlier study. What explanation is stated for these findings? What do you imagine would account for these results? Do you know of a theory that might help explain them?

> **Exercise: Giving Time, Giving Money** In a study about the attitude of seminary students towards money (Lincoln 2015), several students spoke about not giving away money systematically in part because they simply had little money available. Five students mentioned giving of their time when asked about giving money away. Both of these results echo the finding that "perceived lack of resources" or "wealth insecurity" (Vaidyanathan and Snell 2011, 194) was an obstacle to financial giving and that only low givers talked about "the substitution of time for money" (207).

In this case, I simply noted that findings of my study of 21 seminarians were consistent with Vaidyanathan and Snell's study about giving patterns in one mainline and one conservative evangelical congregation. In my article, I did not interpret the findings beyond noting how they stacked up against previous research. The why question (= a theoretical explanation) was not answered. Upon further reflection, I think that respondents who said they gave away their time if not their money were acting on a theological understanding that responding to the needs of the world as a person of faith involves personal engagement and not simply putting money in the offering plate. In the language of the doctrine of stewardship, we are called to respond to God and neighbor with time, talent, and treasure (Hall 1990). Based on other data available to me, by the way, I was confident that many students in the study not only perceived that they lacked economic resources, but they also actually owned very few assets. These results could also be interpreted from the perspective of social exchange theory (Blau 1964), which understands that persons exchange valued resources (money, friendship) in continuing cycles of give and take. In this case, I may not be able to give my money, but I can give my time. Both are socially valuable.

This discussion of comparing your research findings with those of others leads to a second way in which revisiting your literature review is helpful. Your reading about what other researchers said about your research area not only informed you about methods and data, but also about theoretical frameworks. These frameworks might be called theories, approaches, frames, or even lenses (as in Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley, and McKinney 1998). Because theory can be fruitful in making sense of your research findings, you will be doing yourself a big favor if your literature review includes notes about the theories that authors appeal to in their studies. If you do not find theories mentioned, review your sources again, especially those whose findings seem most applicable. Discover if the authors did offer a theoretical explanation for results. Even if you do not find a theory in your literature review, you should look again for information that pertains to your study. New research is published regularly. In the world of electronic publishing, some journals publish new articles as soon as they have been accepted and copy edited rather than waiting for a batch to complete an issue. You may discover a theory in the latest research. It is also fair play to ask your supervisor or fellow students to look at your findings and help you interpret them.

To sum up, one fruitful way to interpret the findings of your study is to place them in conversation with previous research, noting how your findings match or are different from earlier studies. I have also introduced the important question of why—what explains research findings? In the next section, we dive more deeply into possible explanations, or theories.

Interpretation by Appealing to Theory

In addition to putting your findings into conversation with previous research, a second interpretive move is to place your findings in conversation with a theory from a discipline in practical theology or the social sciences. As I write this book, mainstream media is devoting a lot of airtime (and blog pages) to discussions of institutional racism. According to David Maxwell, institutional or structural racism "includes laws, traditions, and practices that systematically result in inequalities based on racial preconceptions" (Maxwell 2016, 9). The theory explains such disparate phenomena as the mass incarceration of Black men, why a higher portion of White Americans own their own homes than African Americans, and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on African Americans and other persons of color. Institutional racism also helps to explain the Black Lives Matter Movement, and why some White people think it is appropriate to show up at a Black Lives Matter demonstration carrying AR-

15s and wearing body armor. A theory like institutional racism is helpful to the extent that can make sense—even tragic, disquieting sense—of American history, cultural practices, and economics in a revelatory way. A social science theory will continue to exert influence for a long period of time if and only if the theory shows why certain troubling or puzzling things keep happening among groups of people. Similarly, a theory in practical theology will exert influence if and only if it helps explain repetitions (patterns) in the lives of congregations or the work of ministers.

Examples of Theories

Next the discussion turns to some examples of theories that might be applicable to the kind of qualitative studies undertaken by ministry students. For other examples, see chapter 3 and chapter 8. In this section, theories to increase understanding of congregational life and the work of ministers are noted.

There is an abundance of theories spawned in sociology and practical theology related to congregational life. (For a review, see Nel 2009). According to some theorists, congregations have a life cycle, somewhat like a human life cycle. Martin Saarinen posited eight sequential stages to the existence of a congregation: birth, infancy, adolescence, prime, maturity, aristocracy, bureaucracy, and death (Saarinen 1986). When viewed as a cycle, a congregation moves from smaller numbers of members in birth and infancy to larger numbers of members, thereby achieving an equilibrium of activities and self-identity in maturity. Then the congregation declines, ending with its complete demise or, perhaps, its redevelopment. Notice that this model is more nuanced than simply saying that there are “new church plants” on the one hand and “established” congregations on the other. Another example of a theory about how congregations work focuses on congregations as communities with distinctive self-understandings expressed through stories. James Hopewell argued that congregations express a worldview through a shared story. Building on the work of literary theorist Northrup Frye, Hopewell posits four main kinds of stories and associated worldviews that animate congregations. A cosmic story optimistically sees the harmony in the world. A romantic story is full of adventure, crisis, and a final reward. A tragic story involves recognition of false hope and surrender to a transcendent power—God. Finally, an ironic story does not look for a resolution of life’s challenges but takes solace in camaraderie (Hopewell 1987). If you think that stories are the key to understanding how congregations work, then you will likely choose a research method such as Savage and Presnell’s (2008), which understands the researcher’s primary task to be as the evoker of the stories in a research context. What does using a theory as an interpretive tool look like in practice? Martyn Percy used Hopewell’s understanding of stories and associated worldviews to analyze the Anglican communion as a whole. “Using the work of James Hopewell, I will seek to demonstrate that much of Anglicanism is an inherently ironic and comic type of faith, which, when understood culturally, can in turn illuminate some of the current theological and ecclesiological debates that preoccupy the church” (Percy 2004, 77). Picking up the cue from Hopewell (1987, 89) that “jokes, stories and lore” reveal important features of identity for a group of Christians, Percy analyzed several common jokes about Anglicans to conclude, with British understatement, that “it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that some of the core proponents of the Anglican Communion are, in Hopewellian terms, comic-ironic in orientation” (Percy 2004, 83).

To think further about the value of theories related to congregational life drawn from practical theology, please complete the following exercise. Write down notes with your answers to the following two prompts before reading my commentary.

Exercise: What Theories Do and Don't Explain

- Why is it helpful to imagine that a congregation begins, flourishes, declines, and ends over time? What might an emphasis on historical development miss or undervalue?
- Why is it helpful to imagine that a congregation is a group of Christians sharing a story in Hopewell's sense (beyond also sharing the story or stories in the Bible)? What aspects of congregational life might be missed entirely by thinking primarily using Hopewell's theoretical framework?

Theories that explain the dynamics of congregational life do a better job of explaining some things than others. Saarinen's cycle reminds a researcher who wants to explore a congregation that its current situation is the product of history. Also, a congregation is not static. The theory suggests that congregations are "learning how to be a church" during infancy and adolescence. The life cycle theory is appealing in part because it seems to sum up "everything" about a congregation from a detached point of view. Perhaps this is a failing of the theory. The only way that I could analyze a congregation properly would be after it had died. In that case, I would be conducting an autopsy. On its face, the theory might not help someone (e.g., a DMin student) who wants to study a congregation for purposes of enlivening its ministry. Once a congregation has reached maturity, the theory suggests inevitability; after maturity, the life and ministry of the congregation in next stages are characterized by nostalgia, inertia, and loss of ability to adapt to changed circumstances. In other words, allegiance to this theory may lead to fatalism instead of finding new resources to "fight the good fight" of faith. Looking at congregational life via the lens of stories means valuing different things than Saarinen's theory does. What counts for Hopewell is discovering the tone of a group of Christians, not analyzing where they fall along a historical timeline. Presumably, a congregation whose story is cosmic (optimistic) might continue to be guided by that story during any part of its life cycle. Notice that one theory seems a-theological (life cycle) while the other (Hopewell) more clearly looks for stories of life, loss, and God. Crucially, both constructs are conceptual explanations and not simply a recitation of empirical facts about a few congregations that Saarinen or Hopewell studied.

Another research area in practical theology that has spawned theories are studies of the work of ministers, especially "the work of full-time clergy working in a specific context" (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 156). What ministers and priests do and how they should understand themselves are described normatively by various theological traditions, specific rules of conduct, and job descriptions. In my own Lutheran tradition, for example, an ordained pastor is called a minister of Word and Sacrament. Her chief duties include preaching and presiding at Holy Communion and baptisms (the two sacraments officially recognized in Lutheranism). Regardless of a specific job, pastors recognized by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are expected to live up to a code of conduct that includes many other activities besides liturgical leadership. For another example of a theologically grounded understanding of the work of ministers, read the extended quotation below.

Expectations of Episcopal Priests

> The Church is the family of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. All baptized people are called to make Christ known as Savior and Lord, and to share in the renewing of his world. Now you are called to work as pastor, priest, and teacher, together with your bishop and fellow presbyters, and to take your share in the councils of the Church.

> As a priest, it will be your task to proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to fashion your life in accordance with its precepts. You are to love and serve the people among whom you work, caring alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor. You are to preach, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing, to share in the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood, and to perform the other ministrations entrusted to you.
>
> In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come. (*The Online Book of Common Prayer*)

These theological affirmations about the role of clergy offer descriptions about the work of ministers—especially, perhaps, ideal ministers.

Sociologists and practical theologians offer other interpretations of the lives and work of ministers, which can also have interpretive power. For instance, in a study of seminarians in the 1980s, sociologist Sherryl Kleinman (1984) argued that students were preparing to be humanistic professionals. Such persons are helping professionals who do not rely on their status as religious office holders (credentialled experts) to serve effectively. Rather, they need to prove their authenticity as reliable, empathetic people to be effective in their ministerial jobs. Kleinman used the term *humanistic* to describe the shift in authority in American life from experts (known by training and the jobs they held) to persons that convince others that they are worthy of being taken seriously because of their caring personal relationships.

Based on the aspirational literature about pastoral excellence (such as Dykstra 2008), I identified nine characteristics of pastoral excellence for a minister serving a congregation, including the ability to think critically about race and ethnicity, explicitly relating ministry to a Christian vision of the world, a clarity about the purpose of worship, and the ability to paint a compelling vision for congregants to follow (Lincoln 2014, 114–16). While such a description clearly did not cover the full range of expectations that ministers face (for instance, there is nothing about administration or fundraising), it does draw together several dimensions of pastoral work in a way that seeks to explain (at least in part) what "good" pastors are able to do.

To summarize this section, there are many theories for researchers to draw upon as they interpret their findings. Students who make a habit of keeping track of interesting theories will be well served when they conduct studies and search for ways to make sense of findings.

A Theory of One's Own: Grounded Theory

In contrast to widely known theories, which seek to increase understanding of large amounts of data from many research settings, another way of making sense of your research findings is to create an explanation that does not aspire to explain everything everywhere, but only to interpret your particular research context—say, a single congregation or the chaplaincy department of one hospital. Such more modest theories are sometimes called grounded theories, building on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967). Many schools of qualitative research claim grounded theory as their origin (Thornberg and Charmaz 2014). In its most rigorous form, a grounded theory approach begins the desire to understand the everyday activities of a group from the inside out without having a hunch or a hypothesis to explore. The implicit research question is completely phenomenological: What is it like around here? As the researcher collects data (by observation and interviewing), the process of making sense of what is happening begins. Tentative ideas about what is going on are modified as new data are collected. (This is the constant comparative method that is ubiquitous in qualita-

tive research.) The researcher is authorized to make wild guesses/interpretations in memos to herself, then to repent and make another interpretation after further reflection, more observation, and more interviews. Grounded theory is *theoretical* because the researcher is interested in unearthing *concepts* that help explain the research setting, not simply describing the action as a documentary filmmaker or journalist. A grounded theory approach is primarily interested in discovering mechanisms or reasons for why a given research setting "works" the way that it does (e.g., what makes First Lutheran Church in Amidon, ND, be the kind of congregation that it is?) than in contributing to the larger process of theory building (what makes all Lutheran churches in rural America tick?). For a grounded theory to be considered robust, it must always fit the data of the setting in which it was born. Careful readers will have noticed that my explanation of grounded theory describes both a way of making sense (interpretation) and specific ways of gathering and analyzing data (a methodology). You are correct. In qualitative research, methods, analysis, and interpretation co-mingle like three strands of a single cord.

In contrast to the narrower approaches for data collection offered by interviewing, practitioners of grounded theory tend to immerse themselves in their research setting. In this respect, the approach is virtually indistinguishable from ethnography. One example of grounded theory at work is the study of two seminaries conducted by a research team in the 1990s (Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and Marler 1997). The research team spent months hanging around two research sites. They went to classes and chapel. They ate in student cafeterias. They made photocopies of announcements on the walls in common areas. They interviewed students, faculty, and administrators. One of their theoretically rich findings was that each school articulated what they called a dominant message. This message was not the motto of the school, the name of any course, or the substance of a position paper or handbook authorized by the school. Nevertheless, the researchers found that schools were effective at delivering a single dominant message to students through all the ways that students were formed (classes, field work, student groups). The message was somehow present in the school's culture. Such a conclusion is theoretical because it is an inference based on analysis of the data that the team collected. It is also a grounded theory because it explains how the disparate parts of the life of the schools worked together to reproduce culture in one setting.

> **Thought Problem** What are the similarities between ethnography, a case study approach, and grounded theory? What are the differences?

Excursus: Academic versus Homiletic Interpretation

As we complete this discussion of interpretation of study findings as a conversation with theory, I want to remind seminary students and pastors using this textbook of the difference between an academic interpretation of study findings and the kind of pastoral and homiletic interpretations that are quite appropriate in other settings. Ministers and priests frequently make interpretive leaps in sermons from biblical texts to present day concerns via analogy and metaphor. The situation of the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness is "like" (somehow) the situation of a congregation that feels that it is going in circles because of an intractable problem. Just as the early Christians had their eyes opened by God to welcome Gentiles who acknowledged Jesus as Lord into the church, so too should Christians in the United States today welcome into their congregations people whose ethnic background is not the same as the receiving congregation. I have preached sermons using

this kind of hermeneutical move; it is likely that you have, too. In the academic community, this kind of interpretation falls flat. Analogies, similes, and metaphors function differently than arguments (Bond 2015). No one can reasonably dispute the poet's assertion that "my love is like a rose" because it is simply a lyrical opinion. You would not counter my interpretation with the superior statement that the data clearly show that my love is more "like a daffodil." What would be the point of me finding the best fitting floral analogy to an object of my love? If I am writing a poem, this might be an interesting conversation because it is easier to find words that rhyme with rose than with daffodil. Such poetic conversations are not discussions about the meaning of results of an empirical study. I have heard ministers endlessly assert that a congregation is "like" a family despite the dozens of obvious ways that a congregation is manifestly *un*like a family. I don't recall my family having a constitution and bylaws, for instance. (I have never heard seminary faculty assert that a theological school is a family. That is, no doubt, also telling.) In social science, if I want to compare one group to another kind of group, I need to make arguments about why I am making this comparison and back them up by evidence. I am not looking for a memorable turn of phrase or a gripping rhetorical appeal; I am looking for analytic clarity. My point is a word of caution. Novice researchers need to be aware that writing a sermon serves an important set of goals such as calling people to focus on God or asking people to recommit themselves to God's vision for the world. A social science conversation or a discussion about how to improve ministry is a different context which honors different rules of evidence and argumentation.

Thought Problem Who comprises the community that cares about the meanings of a qualitative research study? How do their concerns shape what counts as good interpretation of findings?

Themes in Different Key Signatures: Using Timbre to Interpret Findings

In chapter 8, readers were introduced to the discipline of analyzing interview and observational data in terms of themes and subthemes. Such themes are discernable from the give and take of interview language. The researcher makes judgements about themes and subthemes. She uses the power of naming and categorizing. Northcutt and McCoy (2004, 345) argue for an additional interpretive tool in making sense of interview data, what they call timbre. A group of respondents may all identify a key theme but experience it in different ways. "Just as temperature (variable) may range from hot to cold, timbre is a characteristic of an affinity [theme] that has a range." The researcher may deepen an analysis of themes by looking for the range of values in a theme. By noting the "feel" of themes, the researcher makes interpretive judgements about data that make a different kind of sense than simply excerpting quotations. You might think about timbre using a musical analogy. Music written in different key signatures evokes different feelings in the listener. Composers and the anonymous creators of the world's folk music often use minor keys to express somber moods. Different modes in chant also are brighter or calmer. Musicians also mark music to tell performers how loud or soft to play. Timbre analysis is a tool that the researcher uses as a well-trained listener to data. In other words, this way of hearing data focuses not only on the denotative meaning of words, but the emotions that underlie them and the responses that they evoke in you, the researcher.

Based on this brief discussion about the mood or timbres of themes, complete the following exercise. Read the edited interview text below to determine what the dominant feeling or tone is. These texts are taken from interviews of five men at a Presbyterian theological seminary (Lincoln 2012). Be fearless in analysis; it is possible that your interpretation might differ from your classmates or mine.

Exercise: Male Seminarians Talk About Community

- **211** One of the things it says on the banner [around the campus] it's "Being an Exemplarity Community." I know a lot of drinking goes on. And they're grown adults. At times there's been questionable behavior. It makes me upset.
- **212** We preach, community, community, community. A lot of students reach out to involve everybody and get people together.
- **213** In regard to community stuff, I feel like an outsider. Maybe one or two people who are on the same page with me. I'm viewed as a fundamentalist or a Republican—two things which I'm not. There's this stereotype around here about anyone who has come to know Christ, says that Scripture is authoritative and Jesus is who he says he was. I don't feel that this is a place of acceptance for me.
- **221** We're part of something that's alive, an extended family. This institution desires to represent the body of Christ. This seminary is a very loving environment, but not sentimental love. It's the love of respect and care for individuals and the willingness to say, "I don't see it that way, but let's talk anyways." Or "You're hurting. I'm just going to be with you." There's a genuine desire to live out this call to faithfulness. You can be a part of the seminary very quickly. The school is intentional about getting to know you. You feel welcomed.
- **224** As Methodists, we were greeted warmly and treated well. Then we were treated as students, never once singled out or put into a special group.

As I read and re-read these texts about community, I would call the dominant tone positive, but note that this positive feeling is not uniform. Three participants speak glowingly about the seminary community as inclusive, warm, and respectful; but two participants (211 and 213) had sharp criticisms of the community. One of them stated that he was an outsider. As defined by Northcutt and McCoy (2004, 345), it should not surprise researchers to discover a range of values when conducting a timbre analysis. The variation discovered here is an example of what they call scalar variation. Another way of describing the timbre would be to say that the timbre varies by sense of inclusion from low to high.

In the text box below, I have provided text from six women at the same Presbyterian seminary as in the previous exercise. The text has been edited for purposes of the task at hand. What is the timbre of their discussion about small groups (a subtheme of community)?

Exercise: Female Seminarians in Small Groups

- **111** I was part of a small group that started when we did Hebrew together. You become really close during Hebrew. Everything from working on candidacy paperwork to going out to eat, to seeing *A Bee's Life*. Debbie said, "I didn't want to have anything theological, and it was there!" [in the film]. Even in movies! It's everywhere. You live together, you work together, you play together. We had

the groups that seminary staff organized, and then the real ones formed later [laughs].

- **112** You need a support system. In any graduate program, having a cohort is a great thing. Having one that you constantly interact with outside the classroom is even better. I needed a cohort. Having one here has been great.
- **113** The group that I met during my campus visit was really tight as friends and shared a sort of community within the community.
- **114** There are about six or seven of us that have formed a tight group of friends. They are the ones I talk to when I have questions. We are all about the same age and are all from outside of Texas. We say we have a club, BAROT—Born and Raised Outside of Texas, that's supposed to be a secret. But we came from the same kind of experience before we came here. A lot of the students here are from Texas, so to have that support was really important to me.
- **122** Two other Korean students moved into the dorm, so we socialized together.
- **125** On Thursdays they had soul food, collard greens, ox tails, etc. We were all people of color. I think it was seen as excluding, but it wasn't that. We were all just really enjoying the soul food. I checked with others, and they said, they felt it too. So it wasn't just me being paranoid. So I said, if we are going to be locked step, that's not good.

As I read and re-read these texts about small groups, the tone that comes across is quite positive. Being part of a small group (whether formally called a cohort or just friends socializing) is clearly valued by participants. There is a range of experiences voiced. Some said that being in a small group was a way of continuing to think about theology; for others it was a way to hang out with people of similar backgrounds—or get away from all those Texans.

To finish our discussion of timbre analysis, complete one more exercise based on the previous study. I asked female seminarians to talk about "life management"—how they put together being a seminary student and being a person with other dimensions to their lives. How would you describe the timbre in the following texts? Write down your ideas before reading my comments.

Exercise: Female Seminarians and Life Management

- **111** I'm lucky because I don't have a family to worry about. I don't have to worry about the family duties of raising a child. Most of my life is here. I've done a few things outside of the seminary. I took ice skating lessons. Otherwise, I'm pretty much here. I live here. I work here. And I study here.
- **112** There is no life outside of the seminary. Timewise, there's very little other time. I don't feel stuck on campus. I have a job off campus. I go to museums and hear live music. You don't have much time to do those things.
- **113** I don't have much of a life outside of seminary. The church I go to is my fieldwork church, so that's related to seminary. I work on campus. All of my friends are here. We get out and do stuff in the city. We don't just study all day long, but

relationally speaking, I don't have a life outside of the seminary. I don't really have a community outside. For me it's OK.

- **121** My spouse is a saint. He wouldn't proclaim himself a feminist, but he did all our laundry during my first year of seminary. He's taken off work when a kid got sick so I could go to class. We've had to learn how to balance childcare. I'm a grown-up who is a student. When the course schedule comes out, I choose the classes I have to take and make arrangements for my kids based on those hours. If I can't make arrangements, I take a different course. I do what I have to do.
- **124** The person that gets the least amount of attention as far as doctor's appointments and haircuts is me. I live with three people with chronic illness. They need their doctors' appointments. I get the short end of the stick. I wish I got more exercise; I consider that a life mismanagement. My husband has been fantastic. I could not do this without him.
- **125** I have no life outside of seminary. When my husband died, I basically retreated into the seminary in a lot of ways.

This is sobering stuff. Although two participants (121 and 124) praised their husbands, the general tone of these texts is bleak. Being a student absorbs most of their time and energy. It is challenging to balance the demands of family life, self-care, and being a seminary student. The timbre for this subtheme is much more down and out than upbeat.

In this section I have argued that analysis of timbre is another interpretive tool available to qualitative researchers. It is a tool of interpretation rather than data reduction and analysis (like noting themes and subthemes) because it heavily relies on the researcher's judgments about the feeling or half-expressed tone of texts rather than noticing the denotative meanings of words. Although described by Northcutt and McCoy in analytical social science language, timbre analysis is similar to the kind of close readings of texts that literary critics and historians use. It is also similar to how ministers listen for feelings rather than simply information in pastoral conversations.

Theological and Ethical Commitments

So far in this chapter, we have discussed how to put research findings into conversation with previous research and interpret them theoretically. The energy spent earlier in the research process to review other scholarship about one's topic is rewarded during the interpretive phase. Engaging in a scholarly conversation with other researchers reminds you (and future readers of your research report) that the phenomenon you studied is more than idiosyncratic interest. Placing your findings in dialogue with other studies helps you notice distinctive aspects of your work. Next, we direct our attention to how the researcher's theological commitments and values shape interpretation of a study. Here the concepts of intersectionality and positionality first introduced in chapter 2 are built upon. To begin, work through the examples in the exercise below. It is perfectly acceptable to feel uncertain about your answers. My commentary that follows is not the only acceptable way to reflect on the exercise.

Meanings in Findings 1 Leah Gunning Francis (2015) interviewed 24 clergy from the St. Louis area and 13 young leaders that emerged from the protests that took place

in response to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, on August 9, 2014 by police officer Darren Wilson. Her purpose was to divine ways to help congregations "engage in transformative actions." She did this work as a practical theologian "looking for evidence of God's tenets of love, justice, faithfulness and hope" (5).

- What are the explicit theological commitments of the researcher? (This is not a trick question.)
- What other commitments or values might she hold?
- How will these commitments shape her interpretations of findings?

Meanings in Findings 2 Two sociologists studied pro-family organizations in Calgary, AB. One of their research questions asked about "the importance of conservative Christian doctrine" in the movement (Anderson and Langford 2001, 41). They concluded that doctrines were less important than agreement to promote "the hetero-sexual nuclear family" (53). Their primary take-away from their study was that the political effectiveness of pro-family organizations rested on their ability to dissociate themselves from specific religious beliefs and attacks on the feminist movement.

- What values might underlie this research? How would you find out?
- If you were a Catholic convinced that God wants the lives of the unborn to be protected, how might you interpret the research findings discovered by Anderson and Langford? What would be the relationship between the data and your interpretation of the data?

In the first case, the researcher makes a straightforward affirmation of a theological position. She states that she is a practical theologian (which is insider language suggesting both Christian commitments and openness to social science methodology). She hopes that her study will discover examples of ministers and emerging leaders who want for human beings what God wants. Because she also wants congregations to take actions to transform culture, she seems to be voicing an implicit ecclesiology. These commitments have shaped her choice of research topic and her choice of study participants. Her interpretations of interviews use theological language rather than appeal to social science theories. Dr. Franicis also has commitments and values that are not primarily religious. For instance, she affirms the right to dissent. This is not a distinctively Christian value. It may be difficult to articulate all the factors that inform one's understanding of justice. To put it in terms that I introduced in chapter 1, practical theology is a constant dance between human culture (which asks deep questions about existence) and Christian revelation. The practical theologian (and qualitative researcher) does not reside in an imagined space outside of culture, nor (despite good faith efforts to bracket my personal opinions) can meaningful "answers" to human problems given by Christian revelation be received except through the medium of culture.

In the second case, Anderson and Langford do not seem to espouse any particular religious commitments. They are "doing sociology" on a topic of political interest. If you read the published article, they do not weigh in one way or another about their personal beliefs regarding whether abortion is right or wrong. As of this writing, both Anderson and Langford are professors of sociology at universities in Canada. Imagining oneself to be the person posited in the exercise (a pro-life Catholic), I would be troubled to think that Anderson and Langford concluded that explicitly religious beliefs about human beings and human society were unimportant. Catholic social teaching is very clear on valuing human life before birth

and throughout the human life cycle (Agulles 2017). Human beings are worthy of protection because they are made in God's image. My theological interpretation of this research finding would be more like a lament than a celebration or "neutral" restatement of facts on the ground. This research finding might energize me to redouble efforts to create a world in which all persons may thrive because such a world is consistent with God's will for us. A clear difference between the data of a study and how these findings relate to my theological and ethical values exists.

To continue thinking about how my theological, ethical, and cultural commitments influence our interpretations of findings as qualitative researchers, work on the following exercise.

Exercise: The Bible Says Black Lives Matter The Black Lives Matter movement has led to reflection by Christians—both White people and persons of color—regarding resources to empower faithful living in the face of systemic racism in the United States. For instance, biblical scholars explicitly refer to the movement in their interpretations of biblical texts (Brooten 2017; Menéndez Antuña 2018; Smith 2017). For centuries, White supremacists had also appealed to the Bible to justify holding thousands of Black Africans in chattel slavery (Haymes 2002; Goldenberg 2017).

- What's going on? Is the Bible not clear about the appropriate relationship between Black people and White people?
- What factors influence how persons interpret the Bible?
- What factors influence you as you interpret the Bible and interpret research results theologically?

The history of the interpretation of the Bible demonstrates that interpretations of some texts change over time in dramatic ways. White slave holders, nineteenth-century abolitionists, and civil rights advocates all quoted scripture to justify their ethical and economic positions. If you are reading this book, you probably do not take the position that the meaning of every Bible passage is crystal clear. In her study of defense of slavery in the southern United States in the 1930s, Patricia Roberts-Miller (2009) concluded that proslavery advocates voiced a cultural consensus among Whites about race, manhood, honor, authority, education, and political action. They wove these threads into a cohesive ideology. Who is reading a Bible passage matters. My own ways of interpreting the Bible have been influenced by, among other things, growing up as a White kid in a conservative evangelical congregation, discovering historical-critical approaches to the Bible while attending a liberal arts college, enjoying the album of *Jesus Christ Superstar* (the 1970 rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Weber and Tim Rice), seminary training in how to read texts (aka hermeneutics), feminism as an idea and feminists in my life, the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, being vaguely middle class, and reading the Bible with a view towards creating sermons suitable for the edification of White Lutherans. I daresay that you have at least as many influences shaping you when you read the Bible. You and I don't read the Bible in the same way as White slaveholders in nineteenth-century America did because we live in the twenty-first century. Our understandings about the Bible and people who are not exactly like us have also been shaped by such important cultural developments as the civil rights movement and the movement for gay rights.

What is true for reading the Bible is also in play for making sense of qualitative research. All the cultural and autobiographical forces that shape a person are part of the qualitative

researcher's implicit toolkit for interpreting research findings. In other words, your intersectionality and positionality are always present as you interpret the results of your study.

I conclude this section on the importance of theological and ethical values on a cautionary note. Christian theologians frequently tease out human problems in light of Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason with a goal of relating our human situations to the doctrinal categories of one's faith. Such work is a recognition of the enduring value of doctrine. For instance, as I write this chapter, my Facebook feed is filled with sage quotations from Christian theologians whom I respect about the death of George Floyd. His death is wrong because, among other reasons, it demonstrates the deep-seated racism in American culture. Theologically understood, racism "is a form of idolatry—that God can be imaged and God can only manifest God's self through Europeans and European cultural products" (Munch 2020, 38). I have heard good sermons that posited that loving your sports car and over-attachment to money are also forms of idolatry. I certainly agree that racism is a form of idolatry. Rather, I am concerned that racism as a complex of implicit and explicit practices and policies that harms living persons of color virtually disappears from view because the doctrinal explanation that "racism is idolatry" is so far removed from painful human experience and uncomfortable (for White Christians) theological analysis. If your theological and ethical interpretations of research findings elide your data, you have reduced the meaning of your study to dust. In other words, I am on the side of practical theology. My advice is to stay close to human experience in your interpretations.

> **Thought Problem** How do your specific theological and ethical values influence your work in the qualitative research process? Think about these commitments using the lenses of the Tillichian-Wesleyan framework (chapter 1) and intersectionality.

Informing Practice: The Implications of Your Study

Acknowledging the Limits of your Study

This chapter has focused on making sense of the findings of a qualitative research study. Interpreting findings is an art. You as researcher/interpreter are guided in your interpretations by your explicit theological and ethical commitments and a plethora of implicit attitudes bequeathed to you by your cultural ancestors, your friends and family, your knowledge of the world derived from social media, and your spiritual advisors. A final interpretative step in your study is to think about whether it might inform the practice of ministry or the lives of persons like those that participated in your study. As we discussed in chapter 1, a standard part of a journal article reporting on a qualitative research project includes a section on study limitations and implications for practice.

To be sure, a qualitative research study has value as pure science, regardless of whether reading a study will create a "Eureka!" moment that changes what others do. However, many qualitative studies undertaken by ministry students intend to inform the practice of ministry. I will say more about this in chapters 10 and 11. At this point, it is worth spending some time to revisit the topics of hypothesis testing and sampling introduced in chapter 2. A hypothesis is a formal statement about what a researcher expects to happen in a study because of some theoretical framework. For instance, I would predict that the price of cashews will rise if the supply of cashews in the world remains constant but demand for them rises

because cashew and oatmeal smoothies become the next big health food craze. I am making this hypothesis based on the economic law of supply and demand. Poking beneath the surface of such hypothesis testing, we find that such an approach assumes that some behaviors and patterns work across zip codes, political parties, and religious beliefs. The law of supply and demand works the same way whether we imagine that the consumers of cashews are atheists, Buddhists, or Christians. In other words, many of the particularities that we celebrate about ourselves and the social groups to which we belong are ignored in stating the hypothesis because those particularities (variables or consumer characteristics) do not seem to affect rising and falling prices. By contrast, qualitative research is a celebration of the particular: what makes Paris so French, what it is like to be a feminist Muslim woman in Turkey, or the distinctive way that members of your local Unitarian Universalist congregation engage in social activism.

There is a tension in the movement from what I find in my qualitative research study to positing that other researchers would discover almost identical findings in other settings. The findings of my study are, in a sense, historical artifacts. I discovered them. Part of this tension lies in the difference between random sampling and purposive sampling. Without going back to chapter 3, write down your definition for these sampling techniques. Then continue reading the text.

Review Exercise: Two Kinds of Sampling in Social Sciences Research

- Random sampling:
- Purposive sampling:

Researchers who use random sampling want to make strong assertions about the generalizability of their research findings across a large population of people. Since I cannot interview every working Unitarian minister in the United States, I will figure out a way to systematically contact a random sample of them for my study. If I am successful, I am authorized by the guild of quantitative researchers to talk about my results as if they accurately represent what I could have found if I had been able to interview all working Unitarian ministers. A random sample is enough like all other possible subsets of participants (other random samples) that the differences between them do not matter. By contrast, researchers who use purposive sampling do not seek to make sweeping generalizations about their research findings. They seek out willing participants who meet a set of stated criteria for participation in a study, which may be limited to a single community (such as members of the leadership group of a particular congregation). Because I write research questions on a topic of interest to me, I am not necessarily worried about whether the answers to my research questions would be similar if I conducted the same study in ten, fifty, or five hundred other congregations.

Your specific findings may not be unique. Remember, even the shapes of snowflakes fall into identifiable categories. Your findings might have a bearing on similar situations. In Barbour's (2008, 258–9) terms, you can make an argument for the "transferability" of your conclusions. Other researchers refer to the generalizability of results (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 110–28). In quantitative research, the argument for generalizability is statistical. The essential argument is: I've done the sampling and the math right. Because my study of phenomenon X contained a random sample of one thousand participants, my findings are the same as if I had conducted my study using fifty thousand participants. On the other hand, assertions about generalizability in qualitative research are arguments about the way that findings of one study seem to fit or *resonate* with what readers of my research report know

about the world. The findings of a study are not generalizable like the law of gravity. They are *taken to be* generalizable by readers in the absence of other solid evidence to the contrary. Thus, they become “a working hypothesis, not a conclusion” (Cronbach 1975, 125). As I have noted previously, do not be surprised if your study is one of the few or perhaps the only study addressing your research questions in a bounded setting. Thus, your study may provide the best available evidence to date about a topic.

The move to generalize results of your study is fraught with danger, as the cautionary tale in the interest box below sadly demonstrates.

> **Thought Problem: Danger, Will Robinson! One Study Doesn’t Describe the World** In 1951, Abraham Kardiner and Lionel Oversay concluded that American Negroes had wretched inner lives, characterized by poor self-esteem, self-loathing, and hostility. Their research was highly influential. They drew these sweeping conclusions based on twenty-five persons (Kendi 2019, 98).

To summarize this section so far: Qualitative researchers do not make a statistical argument as to why their findings might be like those in other settings. The findings of qualitative researchers become something like a working hypothesis that, in absence of other data, a reasonable person would reasonably imagine to be accurate in similar circumstances among other similar groups. Implications that you draw from your study are more likely to be taken as generalizable to the extent that you communicate to readers that your study followed good research practice, was informed by theory, and is written up in a persuasive manner.

To guard against the problem of making sweeping generalizations based on one qualitative study, the researcher should make explicit acknowledgement of the bounded nature of a given research project. The interest box below shows three examples of how published studies make these honest expressions of humility. What do these statements of study limitations have in common?

> **Exercise: Study Limitations**
>
> - “This book is limited in scope to the perspectives of a few dozen clergy who live and work in the St. Louis area” (Francis 2015, 4).
> - “This study included participants associated with five theological schools, one in a free church tradition and the rest affiliated with mainline Protestant denominations. Despite these study limitations, findings may helpfully inform those concerned with the training of future ministers in North America more broadly” (Lincoln 2020, 87).
> - “An obvious shortcoming of the present study includes the size of the empirical sample; it is difficult to generalize on the basis of only 150 sermons and 11 preacher interviews, and the choice to base the functional analysis primarily on informants’ self-reporting can also be called into question” (Malmström 2015, 269).

In all three cases, the primary concern signaled by the author is the researcher’s choice to limit the size of the study. Francis limited the scope of her study to clergy in the St. Louis area. My study of five seminaries was only a small subset of theological schools in North America; none of them were Catholic. Malmström’s study of the use of questions in sermons

involved an analysis of 150 sermons followed by interviews with 11 volunteers that he interviewed in semi-structured interviews. Malmström also notes a limitation based on his method. He asked preachers about their use of questions in sermons; he did not ask hearers of sermons about the impact of questions. Like the television cartoon character Underdog, when writing about the limitations of your study you should strive to be humble yet lovable. In a report of a study, the transition to talking about implications for practice frequently begins with an assertion of something like:

- Despite these limitations . . .
- Nevertheless, findings can inform . . .
- Because my findings are consistent with previous research, the case is strengthened to think that . . .

Remember, every study has limitations.

Implications: Useful to Whom? Useful in What Sense?

When writing about the implications of your study, your audience is the kind of people that you identified in your statement of significance (see chapter 1) as having a stake in increased understanding of the phenomenon that you studied. For some novice researchers, thinking about implications for practice based on their studies feels like a qualitatively different task from doing research. While gathering and analyzing data, the researcher works hard to listen closely to participants. The opinions of the researcher are beside the point. The researcher's own values come into play during interpretation of findings. However, there is another psychological river to cross before making suggestions to other ministry practitioners. Before continuing, please complete the exercise below. Read the two vignettes (inspired by actual events). Put yourself in the shoes of the students in each of them. How would you feel? Why? Remember, your feelings might differ from other students in your class.

Exercise: Owning Your Expertise

- A Doctor of Ministry student wanted to study how older women show support for the aspirations of girls and young women in Pentecostal congregations in Kentucky. She spent hours looking for previous studies of her topic. She consulted with other professors and the seminary librarian. When she reported to her supervisor that she had found almost nothing on this topic, her supervisor said: "Congratulations! Your study will be breaking new ground." The student wasn't sure that this was good news.
- A group of youth ministers serving evangelical churches conducted interviews with active members of their youth groups on the topic of marriage and family life. The project was assigned by the professor of a graduate course in practical theology that they were all taking. Many themes discovered surprised them. What they were told was frequently at odds with the doctrine and social policies of their churches. As they prepared to make a group presentation for their class, they had lively discussions about the implications of their study for youth ministers. There was not a consensus among the members of the group.

In the first vignette, it is easy for me to imagine that the student is worried that she might have missed something in her literature review, leading to embarrassment when she presented her final project to the faculty members who will pass judgment on it. She might also be fighting sexism that raises a patriarchal eyebrow about a woman claiming to be an "expert" on something about church life. In the second vignette, I imagine that some of the students might interpret their findings as signs of their failure as youth ministers to teach and inspire youth under their charge to be good Christians. I also imagine that discussions about what youth ministers should do to respond to their research findings could go in several different directions: More Bible study about the importance of the family? Less Bible study and more service projects? Double down on efforts to get to know the joys and struggles of each member of the youth group? The implications of the study do not seem obvious to the researchers themselves.

Drawing implications from a research study might feel a lot like offering advice. A ministry student who has conducted a study is, in some sense, the keeper of a sliver of knowledge that no one else has. In other words, she has become an expert in the most positive sense. Owning one's expertise like a humble yet lovable Underdog is a prerequisite to making suggestions about ministry practice. It is also helpful to keep in mind that the researcher who makes suggestions is casting bread upon the waters. The researcher generally has no power to implement suggestions made. (DMin researchers might hold more formal power to implement findings from a final project.) Suggestions and implications do not need to be cast in normative terms like Moses coming down from the mountain with divine commandments.

When thinking about the difference that your study might make in the world, I suggest three things. First, look for ways that your study may problematize previous research. From a social science point of view, progress comes from repeated studies that address a topic from multiple perspectives. It is entirely appropriate to call for further research, especially on a topic that emerges from your own work. For instance, in an article reporting on a study comparing the experiences of women and men at one seminary, I called for further research about gender discrimination in seminaries, life-work balance issues for seminary students, and why men and women experience a call to ministry in distinct ways (Lincoln 2012, 116). Second, implications may be posed as relatively small suggestions rather than fundamentally re-building a role or activity from the ground up. In Andrew Root's autobiographical reflection on a church-sponsored mission trip that he took part in, he made three suggestions for practice. First, he suggested that churches increase the preparation that they provide young people prior to going on trips. Second, he recommended that the emphasis be on accompaniment rather than delivering a pre-packaged product. Finally, Root suggested that participants take part in extensive theological reflection after the trip ends (Root 2008). These suggestions are modest and feasible. The suggestions that you make based on findings of your study do not need to call into question every aspect of ministerial practice.

Finally, novice researchers should remember that the implications that you suggest come from your analysis and imagination. Social scientists commonly say that implications "flow from" research. I think that such talk oversimplifies the world. In the second vignette above, the hypothetical study revealed a disjuncture between accepted doctrine and the attitudes of study participants. The study identified a perceived problem (the lack of fit between the views of participants and church teaching), but the data themselves did not prescribe a solution or a pastorally appropriate response. To put it another way, the implications from a study do not flow like olive oil from a press. A novice researcher might be helped by discussing tentative suggestions for practice with a professor or another student.

Thought Problem How do you feel about the prospect of making recommendations based on your study? If possible, talk about those feelings with classmates or your professor. If you are highly confident in your ability to draw conclusions for practice from your study, what accounts for your confidence?

Conclusion

This chapter has built on the researcher's analysis of data from a project. Analysis faithfully attends to participant words and field notes and attempts to let participants speak for themselves. Interpretation, by contrast, gets at the meanings that can be derived from data. Interpretation is concerned with the why behind words and activities. Such explanations are a conversation between your data and theory. The theological and ethical commitments of the researcher shape interpretation, whether or not the researcher articulates them. Ministry students working as qualitative researchers explore implications of their studies for reforming the church or the work of ministers. Even a modest study can inform the practice of ministry and suggest topics for further research. The remaining two chapters of this book address how the researcher formally communicates research results with others. Chapter 10 revisits the overview of a typical social science article sketched in chapter 1 and provides more detail about writing up results. Chapter 11 addresses the expectations of final projects in Doctor of Ministry programs.

CHAPTER 9: KEY POINTS

- Qualitative researchers look for the meanings in their data. They seek to discover reasons, not simply report findings.
- Researchers need plenty of time to think about the meanings in their data.
- The relationship between my interpretation of study findings and the implications of one's study are not obvious.
- A good place to begin the search for meanings is by comparing your findings with previous research.
- Qualitative researchers can interpret the tenor of participant themes by using timbre analysis.
- The researcher may create explanations in conversation with social science theories or doctrines, or both.
- Work spent earlier in the research process to review pertinent literature is rewarded when the researcher begins to seek to make sense of findings. Always compare your findings to previous studies.
- Researcher interpretations of findings and suggestions for how their study should influence the work of others are creative expressions of researcher power.
- Owning one's expertise and sharing suggestions for improving the world is an important way that the researcher honors the contributions of study participants.

CHAPTER 10

Writing Research Reports

> *Putting pen to paper and producing a representation that is persuasive, melodic, emphatic, and aimed at some general insights based on the particular is the real rite of passage into fieldwork circles.*
>
> – John van Maanen (1988, 139–40), anthropologist

> *For some academics, inaccessibility is the coin of the realm. For some, you prove your expertise by restricting your own legibility to as few people as possible.*
>
> – Eve L. Ewing, sociologist and poet (Toor 2020)

In the twenty-first century, many of us communicate via emojis, animated GIFs, brief text messages, and even briefer tweets. Public officials make important announcements on Facebook and Twitter. Qualitative researchers need to communicate their findings to audiences, too. This chapter is about reporting results of a qualitative research study. As we will see, there are standard expectations for how researchers write such reports. Within the boundaries of these constraints, novice researchers need to make choices about how they present findings. Researchers are not only reporting on "their own" work, but they are also talking about the lives of study participants. An ethical burden is to be borne. Researchers also want someone (such as a professor or church leaders) to pay attention to their hard-won findings. I will argue that you should choose a tone that is closer to Van Maanan's melodic and persuasive voice than the intentionally dense prose that characterizes some scholarship.

This chapter has four parts. First, a discussion about how to write results in a way acceptable to scholarly journals is presented. Templates are provided that a novice writer might use and that show how a researcher can do a great deal of drafting of a report about the finished study even before any data has been collected. Second, I discuss writing for popular audiences and making oral presentations based on one's study. Third, I discuss the question of voice and tone in writing up results of research. Fourth, I offer some advice on the process of writing itself.

Writing Results for a Scholarly Journal

In chapter 1, the standard elements for a scholarly article in the social sciences were introduced. At that point, I would expect that many seminary students and pastors would have found much of what I said to be a bit arcane. Having gotten to this point in this book, I trust that readers are more comfortable with the terminology used by qualitative researchers. What follows is my best advice for writing such articles or a term paper in this genre. A

report on a DMin final project is generally a larger-scale document, with parameters stated with precision by the student's school. Chapter 11 discusses the intricacies of DMin projects. I encourage novice researchers to take themselves and their work seriously and to aspire to the same standards in their writing that journal editors look for in manuscripts.

Foundational Writing: Parts of a Report That Can Be Drafted Early in the Research Process

A researcher can begin writing five of the nine elements of a social science journal article at an early point in her study simply because she must make decisions about the scope and methods of the study at the start. These foundational elements are listed below.

Parts of a Write-up Known Early in the Study Process

- Introduction: What is this study about?
- Significance Statement: Why is it important to study this topic?
- Research Questions and Conceptual Framework: What are the foci of the study?
- Literature Review: Who has studied this topic in the past?
- Method or Methodology: What techniques are used in the study?

Introduction and Significance

Early in the study process, the researcher decides what the study is about and why it is important. One of the differences between writing a qualitative research article and writing a paper for a theology or biblical studies class in seminary is that the author needs to spend time stating why it is important to know more about the topic of the study. Typically, a theology paper comparing Calvin and Luther's understandings of predestination will simply state the purpose of the paper and proceed with the comparison. In the social sciences, scholarly articles do not simply assume that readers will be fascinated with a topic. Social scientists provide a context for their topic. The interest area below contains three examples of the opening paragraphs of reports on qualitative research studies.

Introducing A Topic: Examples from Published Studies

- Understanding ministry today is far from self-evident. Is it a calling? A professional role? A particular kind of identity conferred through licensing or ordination . . . ? Such lively questions are at the center of conversations about the training of wise ministers (Scharen and Campbell-Reed 2016, 1).
- In a transnational world, families with children migrate to a new land in hope of better lives, especially for their children . . . For those new immigrants in Canada, religion, particularly the Korean Church in Canada, provides a very significant home in a new land . . . Nevertheless, we have heard the laments from Korean church leaders and parents in the United States and Canada about young adults leaving their mother churches and the Church as a whole after graduating from high school, and we have called this phenomenon the "silent exodus" (Song 2017, 97).

- "I see so many different threads of Christianity . . . But as a whole, I guess, if you take all those threads and weave them together into a rope, that rope is still predominantly anti-gay" (Nathan, study participant). Christian colleges are unique higher educational institutions that offer powerful symbolic, spiritual, and educational meanings for those who support, administer, and attend them . . . The missions of Christian colleges . . . are also invested in protecting ideals and traditions, including openly enforcing and proscribing various gendered and sexual beliefs and behaviors (Bailey and Strunk 2018, 483).

The first example uses a series of rhetorical questions to help readers see the complexity of the topic—how to train wise ministers. The second begins with the global phenomenon of migration and quickly focuses into the problem of young Koreans in Canada exiting participation in church life. The final example uses a vivid quote from a study participant to capture the reader's attention, then zooms out to general observations about how Christian colleges preserve tradition and traditional gender roles.

In addition to introducing the topic, the beginning of a scholarly article also tells the reader its significance. The example from Song's (2017, 97) article above clearly states for whom his study about Korean Canadian youth is important: "we have heard the laments from Korean church leaders and parents . . . about young adults leaving their mother churches and the Church as a whole after graduating from high school." Scharen and Campbell-Reed (2016, 1) identify why their study is important this way: "Attending carefully to that arc [of learning in ministry] . . . will significantly strengthen the work of persons who care deeply about excellence in ministry and who seek to shape future leaders for ministry."

As a novice researcher, the importance of your area of research may seem obvious. After all, it matters to you. Nevertheless, part of the research article genre is stating what may (or may not) be obvious. I have been part of faculty conversations in which certain topics that I cared about seemed trivial or unimportant to others. I needed to use words to communicate my passion. The novice researcher should focus her passion about her project into a few sentences that communicate that the topic is not one's personal passion. Notice that Scharen and Campbell-Reed began their report by problematizing the assertion that their topic is blandly self-evident by using a series of questions. In my own writing, I try to succinctly list those whose work and ministry might be impacted by research findings. In a study about the different experiences of women and men in seminary, I wrote about its significance as follows:

> Seminary professors and pastors to students will benefit from a better understanding of the range of experiences of the men and women whom they teach and counsel. Denominational committees that oversee candidates during their ordination processes will benefit. Finally, church bodies at large will benefit from increased understanding of the seminary experiences that shaped students into pastors and other church leaders (Lincoln 2012, 98).

Each of these examples argues that a topic is important to specific people, sometimes called stakeholders. In the scholarly literature, you will read many examples of scholars who argue for the significance of their study because it contributes to an increased understanding of a theory for an understudied population (Sharp and Huebner 2014) as well as informing practice. It is not necessary for the novice researcher to make such an argument. It also may not be possible to make such an argument at the beginning of a study, before any data are collected. As we discussed in chapter 9, a theory (a compelling explanation of findings) is sometimes discovered after data are collected and analyzed. Please complete the exercise in the box below.

Exercise: Writing About Significance Use the templates below to write succinct introductions to a scholarly article about a qualitative research study. The topic is: the experience of leading Sunday worship through live streaming. The participants in the study are five church leaders from your religious tradition (e.g., a pastor serving a congregation). Use your imagination to flesh out details as you write. Use the templates as a general guide to your writing.

- Template A: This article reports on a study of [topic name]. Write another sentence describing the topic. Increased understanding of [topic name] will benefit the following stakeholders. First, second, third . . .
- Template B: Each Sunday, thousands of Christians [do something related to the topic]. Yet, few researchers have explored [a specific aspect of the topic]. This article reports on a study of [details about the study]. Findings of this study hold the promise of helping [one or more named stakeholders.] Or: findings of this study are significant because [your ideas].

Below is my response to the prompt using both templates. Text from the template is in bold.

> **Template A: This article reports on a study of** the experience of leading Sunday worship through live streaming. I was able to interview five Lutheran ministers in central Texas who have been responsible for live streaming services on Facebook since March 2020. **Increased understanding of livestreaming liturgy will benefit the following stakeholders.** First, seminary professors who teach worship will benefit by understanding what presiding over worship feels like when mediated by technology, leading to improved training of ministers. Second, other ministers that livestream services will benefit by knowing about the experiences of their colleagues.
>
> **Template B:** Since the global pandemic began in 2020, **each Sunday thousands of Christians** "go to church" online. What was once a worship practice for a few megachurches has become common. **Yet, few researchers have explored** what leading Sunday worship via live streaming is like for them. **This article reports on a study of** five Lutheran ministers in central Texas who lead church services online. **Findings of this study are significant because** most pastors were trained to hold services face to face, as believers have done for centuries. Now they are being asked to adapt ancient practices to the needs of our time.

What did your writing look like? My response to template A is minimalist. There is no theological underpinning or statistics. My response to template B is more expansive (and, I hope, accurate). Both samples plug relevant information into the template. At the beginning of a study, a novice researcher can write this type of paragraph The only variable will be if, in fact, she can interview the number of participants planned for at the start of the study.

Research Questions and Conceptual Framework

The next part of a journal article contains the researcher's research questions (RQs), which are formulated at an early stage of the study. The form that research questions take in a scholarly article is the same as the working version that was presented to an institutional review board (IRB) or professor for approval. In the writing, the researcher does not need

to explain why he has written research questions as opposed to stating a hypothesis. He can assume that his imagined reader is knowledgeable enough about qualitative research to expect a study to be organized with findings paired as the answers to research questions chosen at the start of the study. Below are the research questions as published in two peer-reviewed articles.

Research Questions in Print: Examples

> The question of this study is how expectant clergywomen experience the process of negotiating maternity leave and whether or not this experience has implications for their roles as pastor and mother (Sharp and Huebner 2014,148).

> The study addresses the following research questions:
> (1) What are the gender differences in reactions to campaign messages that include portrayals of IPV [intimate partner violence] in a gender relations context?
> (2) How do the gender differences in beliefs about the causes and consequences of IPV explain divergent reactions to an IPV prevention campaign?
> (3) What does a backlash reaction among men in response to a domestic violence prevention campaign tell us about designing future campaigns or interventions (Keller and Honea 2016, 185)?

I hope that you feel on familiar ground reading research questions like these two examples. Although some researchers do not state research questions succinctly (or even call them research questions), I encourage novice researchers to take advantage of the discipline that research questions provide in shaping a study and in writing it. If there is a place for writing flair and individuality in a scholarly article, I would not use it at this point. At the start of your article, your reader wants to know the basic facts of your research design. They need to see your research questions.

Thought Problem Look again at a published article reporting on a qualitative research study that does not explicitly state research questions. Write research questions appropriate for the study.

As discussed in chapter 3, a qualitative research study may employ a phenomenological, liberationist, or project approach. In a journal article, this approach should be stated. The novice researcher has made this decision early in the study process. The exercise below provides a template for succinctly signaling to readers the orientation of a project and the researcher's own positionality. Spend time completing the exercise, then read my comments below. If you do not live in the United States, please ramp up your imagination as you work on the exercise.

Exercise: Writing Up a Conceptual Framework and One's Positionality Write about a conceptual framework and the positionality of the author/researcher of a scholarly article about a qualitative research study. The focus for this study is to discover what church members think about gun ownership. The participants in the study are congregants from a church in your religious tradition in your region.

The introduction for the write-up states: “About one-third of American households own a gun. Discussions of gun violence and gun rights are part of the political platforms of major parties. People of faith may not agree on the place of gun ownership in their lives or the local community. This article reports on a study of church members belonging to [your tradition] who live [in your area].”

Pick one template below and add the needed information. Comment as needed on the conceptual framework you will use and who you are as a researcher.

- **Template A:** My research question was: “What themes do church members voice about gun ownership?” Learning more about this topic will help [state beneficiaries]. This is an exploratory study. The author [say a sentence or two about yourself without saying any more about gun rights or gun violence.]
- **Template B:** As a Christian and a strong advocate for the Second Amendment, my research question is: “What themes do church members voice about gun ownership?” [You may add additional research questions.] Learning more about the attitudes of church members will help [state beneficiaries].
- **Template C:** My research question is: “What themes do church members voice about gun ownership?” I do not come to this study from a neutral viewpoint. Gun violence has personally affected me [state how]. Christ’s way of justice and peace requires us to listen to our neighbors and to work for the safety of all. Learning more about the attitudes of church members about guns will promote God’s vision for a good society [how].
- **Template D:** In my project, I wanted to know how church members’ attitudes towards gun ownership would be influenced by taking part in two retreats about social justice and violence.

My two research questions were: [RQ1, RQ 2].

Template A fits the phenomenological approach to qualitative research. In such an approach, the researcher may be inclined to say little or nothing about her positionality or will assert some kind of neutrality in a write-up, since the researcher hopes to bracket her own perspectives in service of hearing from others. For example:

> **Template A.** My research question was: “What themes do church members voice about gun ownership?” Learning more about this topic will help pastors, especially those with little personal experience of the symbolic value of firearms, minister better to congregants. This is an exploratory study. The author has lived in a “pro-gun” state for many years but has had few conversations about this topic.

Both template B and template C fit a liberationist approach to qualitative research, even though the positionality of the researchers is different. The liberationist approach wants to make the world better in some way. The same research methodology can be put in service of a libertarian or communitarian vision of the good. The text below is fictional and does not reflect my own beliefs or experiences.

> **Template B.** As a Christian and a strong advocate for the Second Amendment, my research question is: “What themes do church members voice about gun ownership?” Subsidiary questions are: Are there differences between the themes voiced by members who own a firearm and those who do not? How does faith relate to gun

ownership? Learning more about the attitudes of church members will help people of faith that are working to increase liberty see the challenges of communicating with people that want to limit or suppress the ownership of firearms.

> **Template C.** My research question is: "What themes do church members voice about gun ownership?" I do not come to this study from a neutral viewpoint. Gun violence has personally affected me. Two friends who served in Afghanistan committed suicide with guns that they owned. Christ's way of justice and peace requires us to listen to our neighbors and to work for the safety of all. Learning more about the attitudes of church members will promote God's vision for a good society by identifying how fear and isolation motivate people to keep firearms in their homes.

Notice that a researcher using a liberationist approach is very direct in stating her beliefs and values. The hypothetical Second Amendment researcher (template B) and the hypothetical researcher worried about gun ownership (template C) could both conduct high-quality studies.

Template D is appropriate for a DMin final project whose ministry interventions are two retreats about social justice and violence. In the project format, the general research question can be broken down into "before" and "after" questions. For instance:

> **RQ 1.** What themes do church members voice about gun ownership before the ministry intervention?
>
> **RQ 2.** What themes do church members voice about gun ownership after taking part in retreats?
>
> **RQ 3.** How do these themes compare?

As we will see in detail chapter 11, posing research questions this way helps the researcher evaluate the effectiveness of the project's ministry intervention.

> **Thought Problem** Given what you have learned about intersectionality, researcher power, and data collection, what do you think about the disinterested stance of the phenomenological approach? Do you think that it is possible to be completely disinterested or to bracket one's own attitudes as a researcher? What cultural and religious values inform your thinking?

Literature Review

Because the researcher spends time at the beginning of the research process discovering what other researchers have written on her subject, she will have notes and citations from several sources early in a project. This material lays the foundation for what she writes as the literature review in a research report. One of the challenges in writing the literature review section of a report is to make it more than an information dump. To be sure, the writer needs to convey information. In graduate school, my advisor used to say that sometimes you need "to hold your nose and write." A good literature review fulfills three functions. First, the researcher demonstrates that she is aware of the work of other scholars. Second, it is appropriate to note deficiencies in earlier approaches. In other words, a literature review is critical. Third, the review shows the distinctiveness of the author's own study. Remember: you are in charge of writing your report. You should choose words that suit your purposes.

In an article using qualitative research to create a revised model of theological education, I wrote “Although there is a large literature about the great ends of theological education, there is a much smaller and rather unsystematic literature about how seminary changes students” (Lincoln 2010, 208). This sentence indicated the contrast between what was commonly discussed by theological educators (what is the distinctive purpose of theological education?) and the infrequently discussed but important question of the effects of theological education (how are students changed?). When written well, the literature review should leave readers thinking: Surely there is more to be done on this topic. What might it be? Below are examples of generic text to use as the conclusion for the literature review in a scholarly article. Of course, it is possible that a researcher might be able to defend multiple conclusions about previous research.

Possible Conclusions to Literature Reviews

Template A (Knowledge Void) Despite the research that has been conducted on topics related to [my own topic], no research has been done specifically to address [my topic].

Template B (Existing Research Outdated) Although good work has been done about [my topic], this review of the literature shows that no studies have been published since [insert year]. During the intervening years, the church [or society or methods] has changed dramatically. My study will helpfully update older work.

Template C (Contradictory Findings) As this review of the literature shows, studies by X and Y concluded that [state conclusions]. By contrast, studies by Z and A concluded [different or diametrically opposing conclusions]. Thus, my study will contribute to the continuing debate about [my topic or theoretical explanations related to my topic].

Template D (Distinctiveness of Approach) As we have seen, several researchers have studied [my topic] using different approaches. For instance [point to examples]. My study breaks new ground by using [my distinctive approach]. Or: However, no one has addressed [my topic] in the context of [my kind of study participants].

In summary, the researcher should accurately report about previous research. At the same time, the researcher should shape the conclusion of the literature review to generate interest in the author’s study.

Thought Problem Read the literature review sections of a couple of articles in peer-reviewed journals. Do they use language like the four templates presented here? What are your own ideas for shaping a literature review?

Method, Methodology

In formal writing, the researcher summarizes the methods used. Although this book has devoted several chapters to data collection techniques, in a write-up, the methods are described very succinctly unless the method used is unusual. This part of your writing is also the place to talk about numbers of participants and their relevant characteristics. Below are two examples.

Describing Methods: Short and To The Point

> Subjects were made aware that the data collection method would be in person for a one-hour semi-structured interview. They were also provided an advanced copy of the interview questions via email . . . Nineteen participants who met the study criteria were selected via purposeful sampling for the initial subject pool (Anderson and Fraizer 2018, 62).

> The study involved three distinct phases. First, was to identify distinct processes routinely undertaken by the chaplains [at one medical center], and then map them out. This activity is commonly referred to as process mapping. Second, was to gather relevant qualitative and quantitative data through direct observation as the processes were being executed (Griffin, Adams, and Foster 2019, 64).

In qualitative research articles, it is good practice for a novice researcher to relate the method to a book on research methods via a footnote because there are so many different methods used in qualitative research. In my own writing, journal editors have sometimes asked me to explain my methodology in more detail, since I have often done studies using the relatively uncommon interactive qualitative analysis approach (Northcutt and McCoy 2004). Sometimes, in published articles, these elaborate explanations of method are placed in an appendix. (For an example, see Lincoln 2020.)

> **Thought Problem** Read the statement of method in a couple of research articles about qualitative research studies in peer-reviewed journals. Do they speak more about method or study participants? How does a robust statement about methodology increase your confidence as a reader that the researchers knew what they were doing?

To review this section: even before the researcher has collected *any* data, she is able to pre-write many parts of a formal report about her study: an introduction and statement of significance, research questions and conceptual framework, literature review, and methods used. From the perspective of producing a report about a research study, the writing process has two parts:

- **Foundational writing** about my approach to the study
- Collecting and analyzing the data
- **Synthetic writing** about findings and conclusions

In the real life of a qualitative research study, collecting and analyzing data may take up the most time of the researcher's time. The researcher should keep this in mind when plotting out a timeline for her study. My point for novice researchers is that a great deal of "the final report" can be drafted during the foundational writing phase. It is folly to delay. Synthetic writing (writing about data) also can take place in stages as the researcher produces data summaries (see chapter 8) and ponders the meanings of data.

The approach for getting to a written document described here may differ from the typical process that seminary students use to write papers for classes in theology or biblical studies. If the world were run by professors and librarians, theological students writing these term papers would find a suitable topic, find appropriate information from the library's

high-quality collection of materials, then ponder them. Students would then make an outline, write a draft, and polish that draft into a final paper by making several editorial passes (Vyhmeister and Roberton 2020, 203–5). This is splendid advice. Research suggests that revising is often limited or non-existent because of time limitations (Lincoln and Lincoln 2011). Note that, in the term paper writing process, finding suitable sources (roughly analogous to collecting data in a qualitative research study) happens at the start of the process. In a qualitative research study, data is collected in the middle of the work. The literature review is roughly analogous to finding appropriate information in a paper in a theology class.

Remember, when writing a qualitative research study, the foundational writing can be done before a single interview has happened or a single transcript has been scoured for themes. If the student has written a proposal for review by a professor or IRB, the student has probably written text covering the five elements for a scholarly article discussed here.

Synthetic Writing: Parts of an Article Written After Data Collection

The remaining four elements of a standard journal article cannot be written until the researcher has collected and analyzed data. These elements are shown in the highlighted area below.

Elements of a Journal Article to Write After Data Collection

- **Results (Findings).** What did the researcher find out?
- **Interpretation of Results.** What do the data mean?
- **Study Limitations and Implications for Practice.** How confined was the study (e.g., number of participants)? If study results are taken seriously, how might practitioners change their work?
- **Areas for Further Research.** What other facets of the topic might be researched? Based on findings, what new areas might be explored?
- **Abstract.** A summary of the article. It should contain accurate information and capture the interest of readers.

Results or Findings

For many readers, findings are the most interesting part of a study. They are analogous to the big reveal at the end of a home repair show or the culminating conference in the parlor in an Agatha Christie novel where Miss Marple or Hercule Poirot brilliantly explains “who done it” and why. In more prosaic terms, text about results (findings) is the part of the article where the researcher summarizes data as answers to research questions. It is a good discipline for novice researchers to write this part of a report using the research questions as an outline. If the researcher had a single research question (What themes do participants voice about [my topic]?), then the lead sentence for this section may be something like “After coding and analysis, four major themes were discovered.”

When I began doing qualitative research and writing journal articles, the writing of the results was the most challenging part of my drafting process. The reason? Journals typical-

ly ask for manuscripts of a relatively short length—twenty to twenty-five pages (excluding references). After spending hundreds of hours doing research and analyzing transcripts, the genre gave me only a precious few pages in which to share with readers the rich textures of the experiences of study participants: What makes Paris so French, as Cyndi Lauper put it. In practice, reporting results means:

- Stating major themes and subthemes
- Showing how articulation of themes varied among participants (if applicable)
- Exemplifying themes via quotations

It is possible to state themes and subthemes in paragraph form or using a table. Below I have written the same findings both ways. These findings come from a study comparing the experiences of women and men at one Protestant seminary (Lincoln 2012).

Example: Reporting Themes and Subthemes in Paragraph and Tabular Form

Paragraph

One theme discovered in the study was "Emotions," defined as the feelings of students in school. This theme had three subthemes: positive emotions, frustrations (expressed by women more frequently than by men), and roller coaster (emotions ran through a series of highs and lows).

Table

Table 10.1 — Emotions (the feelings of students in school): Subthemes
Positive Emotions
Roller Coaster (emotions that run through a series of highs and lows)
Frustrations (expressed more frequently by women than by men)

Both the table and the paragraph report the same information. In the example, the short paragraph is quite serviceable and communicates information straightforwardly. In this study there were a total of twelve themes. Each theme had several subthemes, totaling 62 subthemes. I daresay that even the most avid reader would be put to sleep if she needed to read twelve paragraphs that were essentially lists of themes and subthemes. In such a case, putting the information in a table is the better choice because it is easier for readers to comprehend.

In writing, the researcher needs to report information about study participants and findings. Some information is statistical, while other information takes the form of stories, quotations, and analytical comments. Statistical information includes anything that can be counted, averaged, or set in a numeric order. In my experience, teaching research methods to ministers and seminary students, the default way to report is by writing sentences.

The novice researcher will do well to follow this general admonition: statistical information should be reported in table form. Please complete the following exercise, then read my comments below.

Exercise: What Kind of Information? In the following list, which items are statistical?

- In an observational study of a small church, a researcher was also given access to records showing the dates of birth of each member and the date when each officially joined the congregation.
- In a market research for a designer line of paint and wallpaper, a researcher asked each focus group member to write down their favorite color on a card without showing anyone else. The researcher collected the cards. There were four groups of twelve individuals each.
- In a study of financial giving, a researcher interviewed a dozen individuals three times. During the final interview, she asked participants to write down how much money they had contributed to their church and any other charities during the past three months.

Dates are an example of statistical information. In the first example, a researcher might key these dates to interview data to aid analysis. In reporting on the study, however, the researcher should summarize these statistics. Such a summary might take several forms, but numbers should be put into a table. It might look like this:

Table 10.2 — Age and Length of Membership (53 members)

Date of Birth	Length of Membership
Range: 1949 to 2017	Range: 3 years to 70 years
Median: 1992	Median: 8 years

A competent reader of the report can quickly conclude that a person in this hypothetical church is a "long-time" member after only 8 years. Similarly, despite the presence of some elderly members, most members were born in 1992 or later. The researcher might also summarize the data into clusters (e.g., one fourth of members were born between 1949 and 1970) if knowing the distribution of ages was important. In the second example, the researcher has not asked participants for a date (number), but the name of a color (nominal data). Since the researcher can tally the number of cards showing the same color, the prudent way to report these data is a simple table of frequencies showing how many chose blue, green, etc. In the third example, the researcher is asking for numerical data (dollars contributed). Once again, reporting these data in a table is a succinct way to report information to readers. When writing, the researcher sometimes only wants to report participant characteristics as a background to reporting on study findings. In some cases, the researcher will draw a connection between some participant characteristics and findings. For instance, the researcher discovered that theme A was talked about only by long-time members of the study site and theme B was voiced primarily by newer members. Discussion of the meaning of results is clearer to readers when they have already read a table showing participant characteristics. When reporting results, the researcher frequently reports the relative frequency of comments related to a theme or subtheme. As was discussed in chapter 8, there is no standard cut-off for determining the line between a subtheme (reported in the final document) and the comment of one or two persons that, while important to those individuals, are outliers (and left out in the final document). I will return to the matter of reporting on outliers. The point that I am

emphasizing here is that the researcher should state the criterion or criteria used to determine how many participant voices are needed for a set of texts to be reckoned as a subtheme.

The researcher should report the distribution of themes of subthemes. In some cases, such reporting directly answers a research question. In a study that compares what life-long Episcopalians think about the experience of Sunday liturgy to the experiences of those who became Episcopalians as adults, the researcher can easily write introductory sentences like, "Regarding listening to homilies, life-long Episcopalians said . . . Converts said . . ." To practice writing about the distribution of themes and subthemes, complete the exercise below, based on a study comparing the experiences of women and men at one Protestant seminary (Lincoln 2012). Write your own paragraph before reading my comments below.

> **Exercise: Who Said What about Life Management** A study of seminarians discovered the theme "life management," defined as all aspects of a student's life outside of the seminary. The researcher discovered six subthemes: seminary devours time; the value of self-care; spouse and family; support of family; matter of balance; relaxation/hobbies. Women spoke about the first subtheme twice as often as men. In the case of the five other subthemes, men talked about them twice as often as did women. No women talked about relaxation and hobbies. How would you report this research finding in a formal report? Why? Remember, there is more than one appropriate way.

Below are two possibilities (besides copying what was written in the exercise itself).

> **Just the facts:** Study participants reported six subthemes under the general theme of "life management" (defined as all aspects of a student's life outside of the seminary). Both women and men talked about: the value of self-care; spouse and family; support of family; and matter of balance, although men spoke about these themes twice as often as women. Only men spoke about the subtheme of relaxation/hobbies. Women, far more frequently than men, talked about how seminary devours time.

> **Also just the facts:** Responses under the general theme of "life management" (defined as all aspects of a student's life outside of the seminary) were highly gendered. Women, far more frequently than men, talked about how seminary devours time. While men identified the subtheme of relaxation/hobbies, no women spoke about this subtheme. Men, far more frequently than women, spoke about the four remaining subthemes: the value of self-care; spouse and family; support of family; and matter of balance.

Both paragraphs convey the same information. Neither of them shifts from reporting findings to interpreting (or, perhaps, lamenting) them. If I were going to comment on the differences between the experiences of women and men in the study in the discussion of findings (next section) of the write-up, I might prefer the second paragraph, since it refers to the differences as "gendered." It would be a nice bit of foreshadowing. As a rule, ministry students writing their first formal write-ups should keep separate "what my study found" (results or findings) and "what I think my data mean" (interpretation or discussion of findings).

> **Thought Problem** Why does the author want findings and interpretation of findings kept distinct in a write-up? What is at stake? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

As the researcher attempts to write a formal report that is "persuasive, melodic, and emphatic" (Van Maanen 1988, 139), she will frequently report some direct quotations. In a journal article, the novice researcher will have space for fewer "purple passages," (as one of my divinity school professors used to call especially vivid phrases from theologians) than she would like. The researcher should choose quotations so that she does not misrepresent what most respondents had to say about a theme. It is appropriate to give some space to what fewer persons said as well. Setting up a contrast helps readers to understand what most people said was not somehow inevitably what one would have to find. Sometimes the lone dissenting voice of the outlier helps the reader gain a better sense of the range of findings. For instance, in my dissertation research, reporting that only one participant asserted that the seminary did not believe in truth helped highlight the two dominant messages (community and professional training) identified by the vast majority of participants (Lincoln 2009).

Chapter 8 discussed two approaches to editing quotations. The first approach is to keep all quotations from the same individual together. This approach allows the researcher to say things in a write-up like, "Sandy—not her real name—described her first encounter with digital worship as 'terrible. It just seemed so fake. Not like a real church at all.' Most participants in this study agreed with Sandy." Because you are a trustworthy author, you honor your participants by quoting words from a participant who is, indeed, typical. There might be cases where no one is typical and the document benefits from quotations showing the full range of opinions discovered. Hypothetically, a document might say something like this:

Example: Summarizing the Variety of Findings Using Direct Quotations

> In the study, about a third of respondents did not respond positively to their first experience of online church. One participant said, "It just seemed fake." By contrast, about one third of participants reported just the opposite. Another participant said, "I was so happy to have Zoom church after being so isolated. It was great." Remaining participants were left puzzled. "Well, they took something else away from me this year. I suppose this is better than nothing," another participant said.

The second option discussed in chapter 8, synthetic quotations, weaves together text from multiple participants in service of vividly describing responses. Because this is not as common a practice as directly quoting individuals, a write-up using this approach needs to explain how it works. In one article I wrote "Student discourse is reported as synthetic quotations that combine the words of more than one participant. The reason for reporting participant discourse this way is that the researcher is interested in showing the range of experience discovered, rather than focusing on a typical individual" (Lincoln 2012, 104). Due to space limitations, sometimes the researcher can only include one or two direct quotations in a journal article. Complete the exercise below before reading my comments that follow.

Exercise: The *TV Guide* Summary of *War and Peace* A write-up is the scholarly culmination of a qualitative research study. Many hours of interviewing, data coding, and sense making are boiled down to 25 pages. How do you respond emotionally and intellectually to the need to tie up all your work into a rather small package? Are there gains? Are there losses? Jot down your thoughts.

As a researcher, I notice the limitations of the journal article format the most when it comes to conveying the breadth of experiences that study participants shared with me. After all, they are the experts, so their voices should be in the foreground. I am reminded of the old joke about a fan who arrives at a hockey game in the middle of the third period. When told the score is zero-zero, he remarks "Good. I didn't miss anything." Even though page limitations shrink the amount of participant discourse that can be shared, the demand for conciseness helps the novice researcher make decisions about the most important things to say. If the study involves comparing the experiences of two groups, the researcher might decide to write an article reporting on each group separately. Of course, firm page limits help writers who tend to ramble to keep on the main path through the data.

Interpretation of Results

After reporting results, the researcher then writes about the meaning of the results. As chapters 8 and 9 stressed, what study *participants say* is different from what *researchers* think those words *mean* or the reasons *why* participants voiced those views or behaved as they did. It is likely that a novice researcher continues to think about reasons (theories, explanations) for their findings right up to the final draft of a report. My first mentor in qualitative research was constantly urging me to "spend more time talking about your findings." Discussing the results of your study will be easier if you have grounded your study in a conceptual framework, as in the liberationist approach. Sometimes one or two discrete findings will be a complete surprise. If this happens to you, it is a nudge from your mind that you should say something about these findings in your write-up. Why were you surprised? Perhaps the findings contradicted what previous studies had found. Perhaps you were harboring a hunch. What was the source of your hunch? Perhaps you thought that "these kind of study participants will say X and not Y." You can write about a hunch that did not play out, along the lines of "There was good reason to think that participants would say/do X." After explaining why you imagined it would turn out that way, you can report "In fact, participants said/did Y, because . . ."

What was found in a study seems solid. One's interpretation may feel like a conjecture. It is quite possible that the novice researcher feels unqualified to offer interpretations. By the time you reach the end of the research process, however, no one knows more about your study than you do. Study participants are experts on their own lives, but the researcher has also worked mightily to accurately code themes and subthemes and interrogate them considering published literature. The researcher has earned the right to have informed opinions. Remember to interpret results in conversation with past research, if any. Interpret results in conversation with appropriate theories and doctrines.

> **Thought Problem** Read two or three articles reporting on qualitative research studies on topics of interest. What proportion of each article is devoted to reporting findings? What proportion is spent interpreting results?

For many researchers, interpretation of findings is the joyous center of the research process because the researcher is drawing on her own imagination and expertise. Novice researchers should expect writing for this part of an article to go slower than other sections. When possible, build in time away from the draft, then return to it to make sure that one's great insight was not a half-formed pipe dream.

Study Limitations

Perhaps the simplest part of writing a final report is noting the limitations of a study. Every study is bounded by the number of sites or the number of participants (and their specific characteristics). The final document should accurately describe limitations but not trivialize the study.

Implications (Suggestions) for Practice

Many journals require reports on research to draw inferences from the study for the real world. Sharp and Heubner's (2014) study of clergy women seeking maternity leave, for example, was based on interviews with 12 pastors. They suggested five discrete interventions for clinicians and church leaders who care for clergywomen during pregnancy (168). Sometimes implications for practice are suggested by study participants themselves; in other cases, they arise from the discernment and imagination of the researcher. Regardless, readers need to hear what you, the researcher, think the implications of your carefully planned and executed study are. To deepen your skill in thinking about the implications of qualitative research studies, please complete the following exercise.

Exercise: Implications for Practice Given the results found in three studies below, what implications for practice do you suggest? To whom are you addressing your suggestions? Don't worry that you haven't read the complete study. Engage your imagination.

- A study of White counseling students working with Hispanic youth found that two key themes were that the students were aware of their lack of cultural awareness and recognition of their White point of view (Malott, Havlik, Holguín Palacios, and Lewis 2014).
- A study of Latina college students found that participants did not speak about challenges in their lives regarding sexism and racism within a framework of intersectionality, although researchers thought that this framework was appropriate (Liang, Knauer-Turner, Molenaar, and Price 2017).
- A study of the motivations and impact of church participation conducted with students at a church-related college found that it was important to study participants that a congregation welcomed all kinds of people (Lee 2018).

In the first example, the implications of the study relate to White counseling trainees and their supervisors. Two possible suggestions are: 1) that White trainees take charge of improving their awareness of cultures besides their own, and 2) that counseling programs training students to counsel persons who come from different cultural backgrounds find ways to help White students go beyond themselves. Implicit in both suggestions is the notion that one wants White counselors to do a better job of serving Hispanic (and other) clients. If practitioners acted on these two suggestions for practice, the changes would ultimately benefit Hispanic youth that had White counselors, but the challenge of making the suggested changes would fall on White trainers and White counseling trainees. In the second example, the authors of the study believed in the analytic power of the notion of intersectionality. One implication is that those helping Latina college students navigate their student experience should teach these women about intersectionality. Thus, the suggestions are addressed to mentors and counselors of Latina students. If the suggestions were implemented, they

would affect Latina students as well. Finally, the audiences for suggestions in this study about church participation are church leaders and professionals. Notice that the findings come from study participants, but those who would benefit from the study are congregations who nurture emerging adults.

Thought Problem Can you know the implications of a given qualitative research study before you gather data? Why or why not? As a novice researcher, do you feel under pressure to demonstrate that you study will change the world?

Areas for Further Research

A journal article typically concludes by noting that the wheel of research should keep turning. The novice researcher should note one or more aspects of her findings that cry out for further empirical exploration. This is the place to follow up on unexpected or unexplained results in one's study. Please complete the following exercise, then read my comments.

Exercise: Further Research Needed? Based on the findings of the studies described below, propose one or more areas for further research. Use your imagination. There are many good answers.

- A researcher found that faculty at five Protestant seminaries and graduates in ministry from the same seminaries disagreed profoundly about the content and relative importance of themes in the lifeworlds of practicing ministers (Lincoln 2020).
- A study of social justice activism focusing on two congregations (a White, suburban Lutheran church and a multiracial urban Catholic parish) and events sponsored by a faith-based coalition found that social activists took issue with the notion that church should make Christians feel comfortable. Activists challenged Christians to connect systemic problems in society to religious experience and obligation (Delehanty 2016).
- An ethnographic study conducted at two Christian congregations and one Pagan collective in Ontario found that progressive Christian women engaged in ritual innovation by borrowing Pagan practices for Easter services as expressions of a common spirituality that spans religions (Zwissler 2011).

There are many possible avenues for further research suggested by these three summaries. In the first example, one possible area for further research would be to dig further into why there was such a degree of misalignment between the thinking of practicing ministers and seminary professors about what it is like to be a minister. Another area for further research would be to conduct a similar study with Catholic seminaries and graduates, since the published study was set in Protestant contexts. In the second example, further research might get at why some congregations take a stance in favor of social justice and why others reproduce a culture of comfortable Christianity. Finally, the third example studied only three groups. Research could be conducted at other sites using the same methodology. Or one could suggest further research about what elements of this "common spirituality" are.

> **Thought Problem** If you lack ideas about areas for further research when writing up your study, what should you do?

Abstract

Some journals invite the author to write an abstract or summary of the article. The abstract typically is one paragraph. It may be included at the start of the published article or become part of the metadata about the article (information that indexers use when making the article easier to find in a database). You may have already discovered how valuable abstracts are as you look for pertinent journal literature about a research topic.

> **Thought Problem: What Makes an Abstract Valuable?** An abstract is a short paragraph that highlights key aspects of a study. Look at the abstracts from some journal articles on a topic of interest to you. What does the abstract include? What does it not talk about? How would you write an abstract to make it the most useful to readers?

Even though the abstract is placed at the head of a published article, researchers should make it the last thing written. Writing the abstract helps the researcher compress her ideas into a few, helpful words for future readers. By doing so, the author's own thinking might be sharpened.

I have gone into detail about writing in a way that meets the requirements of scholarly journal articles for several reasons. First, the genre echoes the full arc of research. Without writing up the study, the researcher has not completed the full cycle. Second, if you can write a journal article, you can also write smaller pieces or make oral presentations about your work. Third, even novice researchers can have their studies published. Good research comes from attention to technique and practice. Seminaries and graduate programs in the social sciences train future graduates through apprenticeship, just like plumbers and heart surgeons. We learn to do research by engaging in its practice. When reputable journals make decisions about what to publish, they ask reviewers to read manuscripts without any indication of the name or academic affiliation of the authors. These peer reviewers do not know if a manuscript comes from an MDiv student or a professor who has conducted many qualitative research studies. I encourage ministry students to take themselves seriously and consider writing for publication. Even if your article is not accepted for publication, you may receive comments from anonymous readers (the peers in the peer review process) that will help you become a better researcher and writer. Finally, many novice researchers will report their results in the form of a paper for a class. Some faculty will expect that a "term paper" looks very much like a scholarly journal article.

Writing for Popular Audiences and Making Oral Presentations

There are well-established conventions in writing an academic journal article to report on a qualitative research study. Most of these constraints go away when writing for general audiences, such as a denominational magazine or a church newsletter. In such cases, the author can talk about one or two interesting aspects of the study without the need to prove one's

scholarly credentials by talking about other literature, method, and the like. Such essays are another venue for using more of the wonderful turns of phrase that your study participants shared with you—direct or synthetic quotations. DMin students can appropriately share some of their work with congregants and other audiences by writing about their work in denominational magazines or blogs. I have found that, once a scholarly article is finished, it is possible to generate smaller essays relatively easily by seeing them as exercises in editing rather than creation *de novo*. Of course, when writing for popular audiences, the researcher continues to shoulder the ethical responsibilities of protecting study participants from harm and accurately representing their lives.

Novice researchers may also be asked to make oral presentations about their work. Everyone reading this paragraph knows the qualitative difference between silently reading a scholarly text and experiencing a poorly constructed PowerPoint or Prezi presentation that numbs the hearer with excessive detail. To put it another way, listening to a presentation is different from reading an academic article. It is beyond my purpose here to describe the characteristics of good oral presentations in detail (Chivers and Shoolbred 2007; Kapterev 2011). I do remind novice researchers that an oral presentation about a study severely limits the amount of information that can be delivered due to time constraints. A well-crafted oral presentation should focus on highlights from the study rather than touch all the points needing explanation in an academic article. Ideally, an oral presentation can give the audience time to ask questions. When responding to them, the researcher can add more information.

Voice and Tone in Writing

We turn now to the researcher's choice of voice when writing a qualitative research study. Like a sermon, a research report should make a positive impact on its readers. It should not be boring. It should not expect readers to have the patience of the saints of old. It is the job of the researcher to communicate clearly and persuasively.

The researcher needs to make decisions about voice in reports. By voice, I mean the narrative strategy that the researcher employs. The standard scholarly article, for instance, is written in the third person, not the first. The authors, if they refer to themselves at all, call themselves such things as "the researcher" or "the investigators." In an article on an emerging church in Scotland, for instance, Corey Labanow (2006, 137) wrote "The researcher [Labanow] contacted and subsequently met with the pastor, in order to explain the intentions of the study and request permission to enter the congregation as both a full participating member and researcher." In some studies, the researcher disappears from the written text entirely via the passive voice: data were collected, an analysis was conducted, etc. Such writing is supposed to convey a sense of objectivity and sound scientific method. Sociologists and anthropologists who write ethnographic reports as "realist tales," Van Maanen (1988, 47) notes, strike this literary stance. The researcher/author is almost completely absent and "poses as an impersonal conduit who . . . passes on more-or-less objective data in a measured intellectual style that is uncontaminated by personal bias, political goals, or moral judgments". This seeming disappearance of the author is, of course, a literary device that might falsely suggest to readers that the author is somehow completely objective.

The author becomes visible in the text when part of a report or the entire report uses the first person. When a report is voiced this way, the researcher becomes an explicit narrator. She may even become a character in the story. For instance, sociologist Sherryl Kleinman spent six months participating and observing in activities at Midwest Seminary. In her study, she reported that she once borrowed a clerical shirt and collar from a seminarian so that the

two of them could visit a friend in the hospital outside of regular visitor's hours. "Some students later chuckled at the story, most thought my behavior appropriate because I was 'ministering to someone,' and a few thought what I did was not only acceptable but commendable" (Kleinman 1984, 40). I am reporting, not endorsing, this approach to research and writing. Throughout Kleinman's book, the text alternates between high-level theoretical analysis, reports of interviews, and descriptions of activities that the participant-observer took part in. The cumulative effect of Kleinman's first-person comments (and guest-star appearances, as it were) is to persuade us readers that it happened just as she said, for she was there. My own school's DMin program asks students writing final doctoral projects to write reflections on the process of research and the impact of the project in the first person. One of the goals of the program is to assist professional and spiritual growth. First-person writing is a way for students to demonstrate such growth.

To think about what is at stake in decisions about voice in qualitative research studies, complete the following exercise before reading my comments.

> **Exercise** Given a choice, would you write a formal report about a qualitative research study using the "neutral" third person perspective, or would you write in the first person? How would you explain your choice to a professor?

One way of deciding on the voice for a study is, of course, simply habit. In my own context, students write many reflection papers intended to bring personal passions to bear on biblical or theological texts. For many students, writing in a more formal style feels awkward simply because they have had less practice. Of course, I might want to demonstrate that I understand the rules of the guild and thus write with the erudition and density that sociologist and poet Eve Ewing laments in the epigraph at the start of this chapter. (I have walked through the valley of the shadow of scholarship many times while reading academic prose.) The scholarly neutral voice rules out hints about any bright moments of sudden insight that the researcher experienced. The genre of autoethnography, which foregrounds the insights of the researcher, seeks to have the best of both viewpoints. "The autoethnographer selectively shares retrospective accounts of epiphanic events in order to illustrate the nuances of a particular culture" (Anderson 2018, 76). A researcher using a phenomenological approach may be inclined towards the apparently neutral voice of third-person writing, since his interest is in hearing the voices of study participants while rigorously setting aside his own preconceptions. I think that the choice of the objective third person is fine, so long as the writer constantly reminds herself that she is asking the reader to pay no attention to the person behind the authorial curtain. A researcher using a liberationist or project approach might choose the first person in order to communicate that the study is about the hopes and fears of actual people written by another actual person and not by a cultureless analytical machine with a view from nowhere (Nagel 1989).

To conclude this discussion about authorial voice, I want to turn our attention to the amount of autobiographical information that a researcher/author includes in a final document. One of my colleagues who teaches Hebrew Bible regularly assigns students a paper in which they interrogate the history of scholarship by learning more about who early twentieth-century scholars were as well as what they thought about the Bible. Students generally use resources like biographical dictionaries because the only information about the author contained in a journal article or commentary typically was the author's name and institutional affiliation. Please complete the exercise before reading my comments below.

Exercise: But Enough About Me Which of the following paragraphs is closest to your own thinking about how much you should tell readers about yourself in a study? What is your reasoning?

- I don't need to talk about who I am at all. The quality of the study depends on having a clear purpose, collecting data consistently, and writing clearly. My study isn't better or worse because I am a man or a woman, from the working class or the one percent.
- My study isn't about me, but I should not leave readers in the dark about who I am. It is appropriate to say a few words about my positionality.
- Readers shouldn't have to guess about where I stand as a researcher. The quality of my study is improved by spending time to explain my history and theological and ideological commitments.

Good reasons exist for each of the three positions sketched in the exercise. The first position is correct to point out that, without attention to ethical standards and technique, a study will be of poor quality. To some readers, it does not matter who the researcher is, or even if they are "nice." It is possible to make a convincing case for the significance of a study without ever telling a personal anecdote. Think about your final study like a jar of jam or a loaf of bread in a competition at a county fair. The judges should decide the winner based on the merits. Such thinking, however, supposes that the world is fairer than it is. Talk about fairness and neutrality works better for those with the most social and economic assets. As Kendi (2019, 38) notes, "some White people do not identify as White . . . to avoid reckoning with the way that Whiteness—even as a construction and a mirage—has informed their notions of America and identity and offered them privilege." The second and third positions acknowledge the need for the researcher/author to come into the spotlight and say a few words before the play begins. In other words, by noting their intersectionality and positionality, the researcher acknowledges their particularity and point of view. Positionality always influences research practice (from research design to the interpretations made of data). In some circumstances, the researcher might state her positionality succinctly in a phrase or two; in other circumstances, a fuller statement of who the researcher is would be appropriate. Researchers using liberationist or project approaches may have a great deal at stake in a study, far beyond the kind of scholarly curiosity that might drive a study using a phenomenological approach. Thus, they may choose to say more about themselves than the simply curious author of a phenomenological study.

Thought Problem Write a sentence of two describing who you are for a hypothetical study. How many dimensions of your intersectionality did you mention? Were there others that you left out? What was going on as you made your decision about what to reveal and what to stay quiet about?

In short, researchers have choices when they decide the voice and tone to use when writing research reports. I encourage researchers comfortable with one voice (e.g., always the disinterested observer) to experiment with other approaches to authorial voice.

The Writing Process

Seminary students and ministers are, in a sense, in the word business. One of my colleagues goes so far as to say that "ministers talk for a living." They talk in sermons, in counseling sessions, when teaching, and being part of the lives of congregants. Over time, ministers and ministry students learn how to talk and write for these various occasions. By contrast, the kind of writing done in qualitative research studies is generally academic in tone. It asks less about feelings than facts. It makes arguments rather than restating agreed-upon truths. It seeks to inform rather than to inspire. As a professor and administrator, I have supervised the writing of innumerable institutional reports and done my best to help students write sermons, term papers, and final DMin projects. An entire industry devoted to books about how to write well exists. For writing in general, I suggest reading the books by novelist Stephen King (2000) and essayist Annie Lamott (2019). An excellent resource for writing in the genre of academic journals is the book of exercises by Patricia Goodson (2017). One becomes a good writer the same way that you get to perform at Carnegie Hall: practice.

Below are my brief suggestions for making the writing process easier. I offer them with the full knowledge that the process of writing (the daunting process of getting ideas out of one's head and into a document in an understandable form) varies widely from person to person. I also offer them with the knowledge that I have sometimes not followed my own advice.

- **Conform to scholarly conventions.** It is a waste of energy to sputter about the intricacies of scholarly conventions like footnotes, bibliographies, and the limitations that journals put on one's creativity. Channel that energy into writing. In the process, establish the habit of creating an accurate footnote or bibliographic reference for sources that you cite (or may cite) as you write the first draft. This habit will save you time. It is a cliché of graduate education that the best dissertation is the finished one. Your report isn't complete until you have put it into final form, including the academic apparatus of footnotes and bibliography.

- **Write beads on a string, bit by bit.** No one writes a good novel in one sitting by starting at the beginning and working through to the end. Successful writers break down the writing task into manageable segments. Each segment of a journal article is its own unit. Introductions and abstracts should be written last. Break down the writing task into smaller segments. Completing each segment builds a sense of accomplishment and confidence.

- **Talking is not writing.** Write, don't talk. While I respect that many people are "external processors" and find that speaking out loud aids the writing process, telling your friends, your congregants, and your spouse about the struggles of writing is of limited efficacy. So, use that energy to talk to yourself or your dog. Writing is getting ideas from your brain into your draft document.

- **Write on a schedule.** Successful writers set aside time and mental space for writing, they do not leave it to happenstance. Over the years, I have asked students and colleagues about their writing schedules. Some like to write first thing in the morning; others write after they've put their children to bed. One of my colleagues is a night owl and is writing at one or two o'clock in the morning. One thing I've been told by students and colleagues is that there is a minimum amount of time needed for each writer's personal process to take hold. For some people, it's an uninterrupted block

of one hour. For others, it's ninety minutes. I like to schedule a writing block of two to three hours. To have a sense of forward momentum in your writing, set a writing schedule and stick to it.

- **Write. Pause. Revise. Repeat.** Good academic writers write parts of a draft, then walk away from the work. After coming back, some of those wonderful sentences do not seem as wonderful. Good writers note needed changes and then write another draft. Revision is always easier than writing the first draft. In my own practice, I print out a draft and mark up changes with a pen, then return to the computer to make the changes in my digital document.
- **Back up drafts of your work.** We hear stories about how records of our ancestors are lost because a courthouse burned down in 1887 and we are sad. Back up computer files to multiple places on your computer, another storage device, and the cloud. Back up your work systematically.
- **Set benchmarks.** Because no one writes an entire report on a qualitative research study at once, set due dates for yourself. For instance, you can write the lousy first draft of the foundational writing about your study early in the project. Set a date for this bit of writing and hold yourself accountable. Your list of due dates should build in time for revisions.
- **Have someone else look at your drafts.** Writers sometimes reach a point of disgust with their writing simply from overfamiliarity. Colleagues who will read a draft and offer notes are true friends. Buy them pizza. You don't need to take on board every comment and suggestion, but your writing will be improved if you take such feedback seriously. If what you write is unclear to knowledgeable friends, it will likely be even less clear to strangers.
- **Use the help that your school provides.** Many seminaries and universities have writing centers, whose only purpose is to help students thrive as academic writers. You are missing the opportunity for self-improvement if you don't avail yourself of the help that your school provides. Writing center staff have sworn great oaths to neither confirm nor deny that you asked for help.

> **Thought Problem** Which of these suggestions are helpful? Which are ridiculous? Based on your experience as a student, minister, and writer, what practices and habits make writing go smoothly?

Conclusion

This chapter has sketched out an approach to writing a formal report about a qualitative research study following the model of a scholarly article. I have argued that much of a report (foundational writing about significance of the study, research questions, and techniques to be used) can be written early in the study. The rest of the report (synthetic writing about results and conclusions) can only be written after field work and much thinking about the meanings of data.

Writing in the genre of an academic social science journal will, no doubt, be a new experience for many ministry students and pastors. Novice researchers should take heart. Professors and readers of journal articles are not looking for genre-busting novelty. They are not looking for the lyric beauty of Toni Morrison. They are looking for information about the purpose of the study, how it was carried out, and what the researcher found. They want to know what difference your study might make in the church and world. You can write this way. I have provided templates for some commonly used constructions in this genre because there is no point in scratching your head about how to write creatively about standard parts of a report. Readers want to know about your research questions, so call them research questions and not something else. One of my professors in graduate school referred to much of the research process as “turning the crank.” His point was that creative reflection about the meaning of results happens only after patient, iterative analysis following a method. The parts of academic writing about qualitative research studies that most engage the creative muse are writing about intriguing elements in results and what they might mean. As you manage your time during a research study, build in sufficient time to ponder what you have discovered and share it.

CHAPTER 10: KEY POINTS

- Several elements of a standard qualitative research study can be written at an early stage in the project. Foundational writing includes research questions, literature review, and choice of method.
- Data summaries and selections of quotations (produced during the researcher's analysis of data) can be imported directly into a formal report from other work products.
- Because of space limitations, few direct quotations can be reported in a standard journal article.
- To communicate to readers, report statistical information in tabular form and data best understood as narrative in prose.
- Reports written for popular audiences focus on findings and implications for practice rather than method.
- The decisions that a researcher makes about voice (first person versus third person) and tone have consequences for how readers will understand a study.
- The researcher's ethical obligations to study participants do not end with data collection. The researcher should respect the lives of study participants in their writing.
- Researchers must decide how much autobiographical information to include in their writing.
- Good academic writing is the result of practice. It is a segmented, iterative enterprise.

CHAPTER 11

The DMin Final Project

The Doctor of Ministry degree. . . . culminates with a written project that explores an area of ministry related to the student's vocational calling, utilizes appropriate research methodologies and resources, and generates new knowledge regarding the practice of ministry. An oral presentation and evaluation follow the completion of the written project to reflect mastery of the project and achievement of the program's outcomes.

– Standards of Accreditation 5.4 (Commission on Accrediting, 2020)

Research in Doctor of Ministry education is carried out in an in-ministry project addressing a ministry situation and primarily aimed at developing the minister as an interpretive theologian. The project blends theology and ministry. It employs tools such as listening, conversation, and critical thinking in action research with academic writing and personal reflection. After engaging personal spiritual and theological reflection, the researcher examines literature contributing to a body of relevant knowledge, then narrates and evaluates a personal intervention implemented over time, usually in a local church.

– Skip Bell (2012, 49), DMin educator

Since the 1960s, ministers in North America have returned to formal schooling in seminary programs designed to increase their effectiveness and deepen their sense of calling. The Doctor of Ministry degree (DMin) is not a PhD degree, which is designed to create scholars. Rather, the DMin is a second professional degree. The ATS Commission standard quoted above contains the requirement for students to write a report about a culminating project on some aspect of ministry. Bell calls the final project an example of "action research"—"a personal intervention implemented over time"—and notes that the project includes theological reflection in service to the student's development as a pastoral theologian. While the final project typically employs social science methods ("appropriate research methodologies"), the expectations for theological reflection and reflexive attention to the individual researcher's growth as a religious worker ("personal spiritual and theological reflection," in Bell's words), makes this type of project different from many examples of qualitative research.

As we will see below, there is a range of options for DMin final projects. In some schools, the student is asked to engage in action research with a ministry intervention; in others, students may use a more phenomenological approach. In some seminaries, the only students who use social science methods are students in DMin programs. In this chapter, I call the persons working on final projects by several names: students, ministers, researchers, and minister-researchers. A distinctive feature of many DMin final projects is that the student

(minister) conducts them in her or his ministry setting. The student is engaging in several roles simultaneously. This chapter does three things. First, the general idea of Doctor of Ministry education is introduced. This educational program seeks not only to give students new research skills but to shape them into pastoral theologians. In this context, four methods books about how to do research in DMin programs are reviewed. Second, two distinctive elements of DMin final projects are discussed: evaluation and explicit theological reflection. Third, based on examples of the requirements and guidance provided by selected seminaries for students designing final projects, the steps of the research process for a final DMin project are outlined. While reading this chapter, a DMin student can take heart in knowing that any observations that I make are overruled by your school's expectations for the final project.

Doctor of Ministry Education

The Shape of the Degree

The DMin degree is a second professional degree, as understood by the Commission on Accreditation of the Association of Theological Schools. The revised standards for the degree, approved in June 2020, made few changes from the earlier version of the standards. In a nutshell:

> The Doctor of Ministry degree . . . address[es] the following four areas: (a) advanced theological integration that helps graduates effectively engage their cultural context with theological acumen and critical thinking; (b) in-depth contextual competency that gives graduates the ability to identify, frame, and respond to crucial ministry issues; (c) leadership capacity that equips graduates to enhance their effectiveness as ministry leaders in their chosen settings; and (d) personal and spiritual maturity that enables graduates to reinvigorate and deepen their vocational calling. (The Commission on Accrediting 2020, standard 5.3)

The degree encompasses both professional and personal outcomes. Professionally, the degree seeks to improve critical thinking and analytical skills for the work of ministry. The standard for the degree does not state limitations on forms of ministry or ministry contexts. In many DMin programs, the students are primarily ministers serving congregations and projects related to congregational ministry. However, persons working as missionaries, as chaplains, or as administrators in religious schools may also pursue the degree and create projects that relate to their various contexts. The degree should increase leadership ability in the student's chosen setting. At the personal level, the degree promotes spiritual growth and revival of the student's calling as a minister. All of this should be done while thinking theologically: advancing theological integration. Quite plausibly, one can imagine a seminary conducting classes in each of the four areas named in the standard. Like a Master of Divinity degree, the DMin encourages growth in several dimensions rather than making one a specialist—the goal of most PhD programs. The interpretation that all dimensions come to fruition in pastoral leadership is plausible, although nowhere does the standard spell out what leadership capacity means in any detail. Although some DMin students may call their final projects a dissertation out of earshot of their professors, DMin educators typically refer to this culminating work as a project or project thesis (Sensing 2011, xiv footnote 1). In this chapter, I use the terms "final project" and "project" interchangeably to refer to what the revised standard describes as a culminating written project.

The Final Project

The final doctoral project is the climax of a student's work in the DMin degree. As cited in the epigraph to this chapter, the project addresses a ministerial question of interest to the student. The project also "utilizes appropriate research methodologies and resources, and *generates new knowledge* regarding the practice of ministry" (Commission on Accrediting 2020, standard 5.4, emphasis added). The previous standard stated that the final project "should be of sufficient quality that it *contributes to the practice of ministry* as judged by professional standards and has the potential for application in other contexts of ministry" (Commission on Accrediting 2010, degree standard E.2.4, emphasis added). The revised standard uses more standard academic language in calling for projects to produce "new knowledge regarding the practice of ministry." PhD dissertations typically are expected to make an original contribution to knowledge in a field. For example, the Commission on Accrediting (2020) of ATS states that a PhD or ThD program concludes with "a written doctoral dissertation that demonstrates original and scholarly research" (standard 5.14). Both the old and new language about the final project makes it clear that the project should make a new contribution to the practice of ministry. To use the language of chapter 1, a project should contain a significance statement, indicating how the work can benefit others engaged in ministry.

By inference, the appropriate "methodologies and resources" to be used in the project correlate to the four outcomes of the program named in standard 5.3. Thus, a student needs to identify ministry issues and think about them contextually and theologically. Both social science methods and tools from practical theology (that tease out the layers of situations, systems, and organizations) and theological resources in the biblical-doctrinal sense (that frame a minister's work as something more than social work or anthropology) are required. In other words, the final project is a work of practical theology conducted by a practical theologian.

> **Thought Problem** Based on what you know about Doctor of Ministry education and the discussion so far in this chapter, what do you think makes a DMin final project distinctive? What tools do you need to demonstrate "theological acumen"?

Four Methods Books

Because the DMin final project has one foot planted in theology and the other in the analysis of context and human experience (the domain of the social sciences), several authors have written works intended to help DMin students and educators think about research theologically and conduct pastoral experiments or ministry interventions with elements of rigor as understood by social scientists. Next, I briefly summarize and critique four of them: by Richard E. Davies (1984), William R. Myers (1997), Carl Savage and William Presnell (2008), and Tim Sensing (2011). The purpose of this excursion is to provide readers with an increased appreciation of the distinctiveness of DMin final projects and the methods that fit such projects.

Davies (1984) Richard Davies's approach to DMin projects is rooted in what he calls objective structured observation of an aspect of ministry. "You are to observe something (and draw conclusions)" (xi). For Davies, a final project is frequently an example of experimentation. The researcher implements a program and evaluates its effectiveness. He contrasts "routine ministerial program evaluation" with formal evaluation based on goals and data

collection. He notes that the way that ministers typically evaluate programs "is also likely to come from the romantic tradition, so that if we can see that the program benefited one person, and didn't harm anyone, we pronounce the program to have been worthwhile" (10).

Standing squarely in the tradition of quantitative research, Davies states that a ministry question or problem framing research will lead to a hypothesis related to the program (ministry intervention) that the DMin student undertakes. Because he operates in a quantitative paradigm, Davies explains how aspects of the project need to be operationalized into measurable variables. He uses an example of a DMin project that had eight objectives, one of which was "To increase the amount and depth of communication within marriages." To evaluate (measure) data related to this objective quantitatively, he suggests that the researcher collect data on "the length of each conversation or the topics covered in conversations" by married couples (105).

In his chapter on the relationship between theology and empirical research (73–96), Davies notes that a set of theological commitments functions as a framework for a DMin study. A researcher might develop research questions for a study, then develop a theological basis for them. More commonly, he thinks, the researcher will identify "a theological guide, probably a published theologian with whom you agree. . . . and let these writings suggest the research question" (76). He provides several examples of how to use theological statements as the basis for projects. The project is shaped around finding out the extent to which individuals know about or agree with a theological idea. For instance, a project grounded in the centrality of faith and grace as understood by Protestants could have three research questions:

- How are the concepts of "faith" and grace" understood in my parish?
- How will these concepts be understood following a carefully structured sermon series?
- How will these concepts be understood following a carefully designed teaching series? (77)

Much of Davies's book is devoted to explaining quantitative methods that DMin students can use in evaluating the effects of their project. He covers such techniques as random sampling, independent and dependent variables (97–120) and tests of statistical significance (155–86). Statistical tests are mathematically rigorous methods for determining the likelihood that the results obtained (e.g., in a survey) are due to chance rather than to genuine differences. If a student adheres to a quantitative research approach, she is obliged to take statistical significance seriously.

Davies recognizes that his work does not construct an overall argument and includes "some chapters [that] are collections of ideas and references'' (xi). In several places, he introduces an evaluation tool and simply suggests a source for further reading to understand it, including sophisticated psychological or spiritual assessment tools. There is no extended discussion of research ethics, how to recruit participants for a DMin project, or how to conduct interviews. His discussions of quantitative statistics (e.g., the t-test) are accurate. His discussion of how to write survey questions is well-done. Davies's book addresses observation in an experimental or quasi-experimental sense rather than in the ethnographic sense of the researcher as an embedded participant observer. While lacking the subtlety of theological analysis provided by the tools of practical theology, he takes seriously the theological dimensions of the final project.

The handbook presupposes that the would-be researcher is either well-versed in quantitative research methods or is being guided by professors who are. One reviewer noted that the book "obscures the steps in the ministry and research designing process" (Brewer 1986,

209). A careful reader, however, can glean the main steps for project design, according to Davies. Guided by a theological framework, the student-researcher writes research questions and determines the goals for a ministry intervention. After conducting the ministry intervention, the researcher then evaluates the results using quantitative methods such as surveys.

Myers (1997) William Myers wrote *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program* as a guide for Doctor of Ministry students. He explicitly argues against Enlightenment notions of rigor in science. He takes issue with the idea that science should depend solely on quantitative measurements taken, when possible, under experimental conditions. Instead, he uses examples from DMin projects completed at Chicago Theological Seminary to illustrate the steps in producing a professional project that is grounded in the practice of Christian ministry and explicit theological reflection. In broad outline, Myers argues that the DMin research process has the following sequence:

1. Stating a problem or issue in the practice of ministry of personal interest to the researcher.
2. Describing in detail the ministry setting in which the problem arises.
3. Stating an "initial working theory" about ministry (17) that makes clear the student's theological stance and, perhaps, other commitments (e.g., a certain understanding of how pastoral counseling works) in dialogue with the identified ministry issue.
4. Adopting a pro-active research stance and identifying qualitative tools for data collection.
5. Deciding on a set of activities that the minister initiates to address the ministry problem.
6. While leading these activities (the project), the minister-researcher gathers data that assist her in understanding the impact or results of the project. Data sources may include those used in ethnographic or case study research: interviews, observations, documents, artifacts.
7. The researcher codes data (analyzes them) continually throughout the project. The results of these analyses may lead to modifications in activities in the project, or further efforts at assessing the impact of the project in the ministry setting.
8. The final report on the project is framed as the work of a pastor addressing a real-world concern with theological and methodological integrity.

Myers calls this approach a case study because the minister-researcher is continually aware that all aspects of the ministry setting impinge on the study and because the ministry intervention (project) is not intelligible outside of the ministry issue identified in a particular place and time by the minister-researcher. Myers identifies the stance that he advocates as a pro-active research method. He contrasts it with quantitative and ethnographic approaches (25–30). The pro-active research method is more fitting than the other two approaches for DMin projects for theological reasons, according to Myers:

> [T]his third research method—the pro-active—is radically different from methods one and two and sounds congruent with those implications of transformation most closely associated with

> Judeo-Christian conceptions of ministry. It most closely fits, for example, the theological claims made by most Doctor of Ministry programs. (32)

Myers's approach stands in stark contrast to Davies's approach. Although both grant that a minister-researcher may discover a ministry problem to explore from lived experience, Davies urged the use of standard quantitative statistical methods and reasoning. Myers argues that DMin research can serve the practical purpose of improving ministry without employing quantitative methods such as hypothesis construction and the use of tests of statistical significance. Instead, the minister-researcher can collect data from participants via interviews and questionnaires as well as "subjective material generated by the researcher" (30) in field notes and interpretive narration. A case study thus weaves together the setting, the researcher-minister, and participants into a "descriptive narrative (a 'story')" (5).

Myers describes a clear sequence of events for ministry students to use as they work from an initial idea to a completed project. He highlights what is theological about a DMin final project and is insistent that the minister-researcher is a main character in the story. He describes an intelligible sequence of activities and reflection that the student-researcher undertakes, including discussions with supervisors. He provides specific examples of his approach in practice from DMin students at Chicago Theological Seminary. Because the book is brief, it contains no detailed instructions on how to use the qualitative research tools that Myers suggests are useful. He provides an annotated bibliography (79–84) of such tools.

Narrative Research in Ministry (2008) DMin educators Carl Savage and William Presnell created a distinctive approach to DMin final projects that they call narrative research in ministry (NRM). The NRM approach is intentionally postmodern and stresses the importance of narrative and theological reflection.

The NRM approach is unapologetically postmodern. For Savage and Presnell, postmodernity entails a rejection of modern notions such as objectivity, facts, and data. Based on their interpretation of the work of Stanley Grenz (1996), a postmodern approach values the making of contemporary meaning through stories. "You as a postmodernist create a narrative. You do not simply read a script" (Savage and Presnell 2008, 33). Although postmodernists do not like to pin things down (including, to the reader's detriment, what counts as a postmodern approach), they typically are skeptical of authority and value socially situated knowledge. For Savage and Presnell, embracing a postmodern approach means leaning into the power of narrative to create meaning: "While history is supposedly aimed at the past, narrative is aimed at a tradition. Narrative's aim is to express meaning . . . and to address the presently held order" (43).

In the NRM approach, the researcher's main job is to figure out a "narrative of concern or opportunity" (78) within a research setting, typically a congregation. The researcher does not do this alone, however. She works with a group of volunteers to discern a narrative that can be embraced by many in the research setting. The research team gets at this narrative primarily by listening to stories told by congregants and others associated with the research setting and "begins a theological/critical dialogue with them" (99). Other sources of information are valuable (e.g., congregational records, information about the neighborhood in which the research site is situated) but are not more valuable than the stories that individuals craft to make sense of their world. So, the NRM approach values stories, but these stories are local stories not subsumed under a grand paradigm of interpretation as Hopewell (1987) argues for.

All of this background work needs to be done before deciding on the particulars of a ministry project, which seeks to move the community from the narrative of concern/opportunity to a new narrative in which the community has addressed the concern or seized an

opportunity. For instance, to discern what the congregation should do about gravesites on its property, a researcher and co-researcher team "will design and implement a series of structured dialogue sessions" informed by biblical stories and teaching about the communion of saints (Savage and Presnell 2008, 101). Congregants will have access to a written summary of the dialogues, including theological analysis, to guide planning. The mundane outcome of the project would be reaching a consensus about what to do with the gravesites. (In this particular case, the congregation's concern was whether to keep the graves where they are or relocate them so that the property could be repurposed.) Just as importantly, the hoped-for outcome would be writing a new narrative of what God intends for the congregation to be in its specific time and place.

The NRM approach is explicitly theological. "In order to keep faith with our religious identity and the purposes of ministry, research in ministry must first be framed theologically" (50). In agreement with practical theologians such as Stephen Pattison (2000) and the four parts of the Wesleyan quadrilateral, theological reflection considers the particularities of a research setting in conversation with scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. The work of the researcher is a kind of "hovering over the faith-storied experiences [that] human beings find meaningful" (Savage and Presnell 2008, 67) to take a snapshot of the ever-changing life of the community. They suggest that a good way for the researcher to have access to what God is doing in a place is "immersion in the usual practices of a faith community" (72). To put it another way, participant observation is an appropriate data gathering technique when combined with theological sensitivity.

Evaluation of a project in the NRM approach entails three parts. First, the researcher can observe changes that appear to be related to the project. "[Y]ou compare the state of the context prior to a new ministry intervention and afterwards" (124). Second, the researcher can make judgements about "transformation toward a preferred future." The authors suggest that such evaluation could happen in a variety of ways. Individuals in a congregation might be transformed— or the researcher, or the co-researchers. "In other words, did anyone notice?" (127). Third, outside evaluators (presumably faculty members) make judgements about the quality of the execution of the project. Thus, there is no simple answer to the question: did the project succeed? For Savage and Presnell, a good project is one that moves a community into a future that shows signs of the Spirit of God at work. In this sense, evaluation is not an act of measurement but of pastoral discernment.

The NRM approach for a final DMin project has several attractions for ministry students. First, researchers using this approach are asked to think theologically throughout the research process. Questions like "What is God up to?" are asked at all stages of the project. This approach may seem better than the phenomenological approach, which asks the researcher to bracket her own values during data collection. NRM assumes that the researcher and the religious community being studied share a set of common theological commitments. Second, as a form of action research, NRM engages members of the religious community in a discernment process to figure out what the ministry intervention should be. This approach stands in contrast with the general approach to qualitative research, in which the researcher explores research questions of interest to her. To put it another way, in the NRM approach the researcher and the co-research team decide on the research questions (i.e., they create the narrative of opportunity or concern). Third, the NRM approach understands evaluation in a complex way. The researcher and faculty members evaluating the performance of the student are not "grading pass/fail." The approach to evaluation frees the student from thinking that her project has utterly failed if it does not produce enough discernable change.

The NRM approach also has limitations. First, as a practical matter, this approach requires the DMin student to have a high level of participation from co-researchers throughout the project. Experience teaches us that it is not easy for DMin students to sustain the engage-

ment of co-researchers throughout a complex set of activities like an NRM project. Second, the researcher needs to set aside the professional interests that motivated her to work on a DMin in favor of the concerns of others. This may be difficult to do. One commentator aptly asks: "Is it not appropriate for a well trained pastor to lead a congregation in a certain direction through a DMin. project—a direction a congregation might not want initially to go?" (Jones 2010, 95). Third, this approach asks the researcher to become what Savage and Presnell (2008, 75) call "a story broker." The story broker artfully interprets the swirling narratives/story-like data of the setting and helps the co-researchers make judgments about a particular something in the current life of the community (the narrative or concern or opportunity) and about what a better future (God's preferred future) ought to be. That is no small task. More to the point for novice researchers, Savage and Presnell do not provide a set of steps for doing all of this story brokering, perhaps because they are suspicious of reductionist, "modernist" methods. When it comes to identifying the "modest and practical tools often used in Doctor of Ministry projects," the authors list such tools as "focus group formats, pre- and post-project questionnaire, Likert scales and checklists, behavioral observation and analysis" (197). The would-be practitioner of NRM must look elsewhere to learn how to use these tools. The NRM approach is distinctive because it values stories and recasts other forms of data into stories, always with faith that God works through stories. I leave it to others to comment on the depth of Savage and Presnell's understanding of postmodernism.

Sensing (2011) The final of our four books focusing on the distinctiveness of DMin final projects is Tim Sensing's *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Method Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Sensing provides guidance on using a variety of qualitative research methods for final projects. He speaks directly to DMin students, based on years of helping students craft final projects. Philosophically grounded in pragmatism, he advocates that students use "a form of action research that employs a multi-methods approach within [a] community located in a specific setting and is intended to bring transformation" (54–5). He recognizes that the community—most frequently the congregation being served by the pastor-researcher—needs to be involved in the planning for the project. Sensing assumes that a final project involves a ministry intervention whose purpose is to move participants towards positive transformation. His book takes students sequentially through the stages of executing such a project from start to finish. He explains, for instance, how to write a prospectus (a relatively brief document laying out the design of the project for approval) and prepare for the oral presentation that students make as the final step in project approval.

Sensing understands that a final project is an exercise in practical theology. A student expresses the "theological underpinnings or primary theological constructs" (24) early in the final project report. This framing links a relatively modest project to larger theological ideas. For instance, a student whose project centered on training teachers to facilitate classes on spiritual disciplines situated his project in a deep understanding of Christian life as participation in God's own life. "Individual and corporate practice of spiritual disciplines is a means of collaborating with God in the process of spiritual transformation" (Reynolds 2006, cited in Sensing 2011, 11). In other words, the student writes a significance statement in explicitly theological terms. In Sensing's approach, students return to their theological framework as they interpret the results of their project. Such reflection "will not merely reflect upon your project but will also make pastoral proposals for the future life of the church" (231). Students benefit from reflecting theologically on the project whether the project appears to accomplish its stated goals or not. Sensing assumes that students who engage in DMin projects have developed the capacities needed to engage in this kind of reflection. Sensing explains how to use a combination of methods, including purposive sampling, observation, and interviewing. He also advocates using quantitative tools like Taylor-Johnson

Temperament Analysis to aid in evaluation, when applicable. Recognizing that final projects may produce artifacts (e.g., a new youth ministry curriculum) or involve performances (e.g., the delivery of sermons), the book discusses a range of evaluative approaches. He provides examples of sermon evaluation forms and observation protocols (239–47). Evaluation might also rely on pastor colleagues or independent experts (e.g., a seminary professor who is not the student's supervisor).

Sensing's book is well-written and grounded in experience. He straightforwardly urges DMin students away from some practices and towards others. He provides an abundance of examples from final projects at his own school. He never loses sight of what is theological and pastoral about final projects.

What do these four books contribute to our understanding of the distinctive nature of DMin final projects? All of them recognize that the project is an explicit instance of practical theology in action rather than "pure" social science. All four authors recognize that students engaged in these projects speak theology as a first language and are learning the second language of social science. Myers argues for a case study approach. Savage and Presnell argue for an approach that is rooted in the theological analysis of stories. All four books stress that a DMin project is action research. Projects seek to make a positive change in the life of the religious community, most often a single congregation. As instances of action research, final projects cannot be done without the collaboration of others. While only Davies focuses on quantitative methods, Sensing also recognizes that sometimes quantitative methods are appropriate tools for evaluation. The books by Davies and Sensing devote the most space to the mechanics of research design, data collection, and analysis.

> **Thought Experiment** Compare the summaries of these four books about DMin final projects with your school's guidelines and culture in the DMin program. What is similar? What is different?

Evaluation and Theological Reflection in DMin Final Doctoral Projects

Accounting for Evaluation in the Design of a Project

ATS standard 5 requires evaluation of the culminating project in a DMin program to "reflect mastery" of the project. As written, the most logical persons to perform this evaluation would be faculty members. In this sense, evaluation is a form of grading. In practice, however, DMin students are expected to evaluate the success or impact of projects that contain ministry interventions. As we have seen in the discussion of methods books, final projects frequently include such quasi-experiments, which are sometimes understood by students as (oddly but accurately) "the project part of my project." Thus, the design of the project includes identifying techniques for knowing the extent to which the project achieved its goals. In chapter 4, I suggested that a final project asks distinctive research questions (RQs) to get at the knowledge or perceptions of study participants before and after the project. Thus:

1. **RQ 1.** What do study participants know/think/believe about my topic before my ministry intervention?

2. **Ministry Intervention.** The researcher engages study participants in educational and/or formational events fitted to the researcher's topic.
3. **RQ 2.** What do study participants know/think/believe about my topic after my ministry intervention?

When posed this way, evaluation in a DMin final project seeks to ascertain change in the attitudes, beliefs, or knowledge of study participants. (See chapter 7.) Please complete the following exercise before reading my comments below. Jot down your thoughts.

> **Exercise: Before and After** How might a DMin student gauge change? What are the challenges to measuring the success or impact of a ministry intervention project? How might these challenges be overcome?

If the purpose of a DMin project is primarily educational, then it is appropriate to determine change by finding out the amount of learning that happened. This is why teachers give tests. In higher education, professors and administrators write learning outcomes for courses and degree programs. The content of courses (curriculum) should match these outcomes. Ideally, students are tested on material that maps to the same learning outcomes. Thus, there is no competition between "teaching to the test" and "teaching what students ought to know" (independent of the need to evaluate) because a group of educators sharing a common purpose (the faculty) have designed the degree program—its learning outcomes, courses, and activities and assignments within courses—all to work harmoniously towards a common goal. In a DMin final project, it is quite sensible to ask study participants what they know before and after the ministry intervention that sits in the middle of the project. Of course, in a DMin project, it is likely that fewer people will be involved in thinking about all of the moving parts of the ministry intervention (in this case, a series of educational activities) than at a school.

If the purpose of a DMin project is formational—i.e., seeks to shape attitudes and values—evaluation might contrast how students speak or write about themselves before the start of the project and afterward. For instance, study participants might write spiritual autobiographies or short essays in response to a prompt. The researcher can discern change by comparing both sets of work using a rubric. There are also quantitative tools to assess spiritual or psychological change (Crisp, Porter, and Elshoff 2018; Zarzycka and Zietek 2019).

> **Thought Problem** I have identified educational and formational goals for DMin final projects. What other kinds of goals might a student write? How would the student evaluate the success of such goals?

Another approach to evaluation seeks to measure impact. The most significant change (MSC) technique, for instance, has been used around the world to measure the difference that economic development programs have made in the lives of people (Davies and Hart 2005). This technique does not rely on pre-identified goals or indicators (e.g., number of persons vaccinated). Instead, the impact of a program is measured by asking the persons affected by the program (sometimes called beneficiaries or clients) to share stories. In this approach, a group of participants identifies broad areas of change (domains). Staff and beneficiaries are asked to tell stories about the most significant change that they witnessed for program participants in the last month. These stories are collected over time and shared up and down the hierarchy of the program. Leaders select stories that they think are representative of import-

ant changes. The validity of this selection is checked by asking for feedback from clients in the program. Eventually, relevant quantitative information is added to the narratives. The MSC process can then be used to re-think the purposes and activities of the program. The MSC approach is a form of action research, relying on researchers (professional staff) and co-researchers (beneficiaries of the program) to collect data (stories), make sense of them, and draw conclusions. The approach is like Lincoln and Guba's (1985, 314–16, 373–8) member checking technique, which advocates testing researcher conclusions with study participants. In the MSC approach, however, the researchers are not simply seeking confirmation that the study adequately depicts the social reality that researchers studied. The MSC method of evaluation hopes to discover changes that were not foreseen by researchers at the onset of the project. To reflect further on the MSC approach, jot down your thoughts about the exercise question below.

> **Exercise** How does the MSC technique for measuring impact differ from evaluation that is clearly tied to the stated research questions of a project? Could using a version of the most significant change approach help DMin students? If so, how?

Even when researchers organize a project around research questions, results can be surprising. Activities done with intention might produce other effects, some desired and others not. As I write this chapter, for instance, many Americans are clamoring for schools to re-open despite the stubborn persistence of cases of COVID-19. Much of the passion for reopening schools is not about formal student learning (reading, writing, and arithmetic), but about ancillary purposes that schools serve, such as being a place for students to eat nutritious meals and develop friendships. A ministry intervention might not produce the impacts (read: achieve tangible goals) that the researcher wanted as stated in terms of research questions. However, it might have other positive effects. Collecting data on these other outcomes of a project could enhance the ministry of DMin students and others. For instance, a project intended to teach adults about a biblical doctrine might not produce much learning as measured against learning outcomes but might produce a renewed sense of community or feeling of being closer to God among participants. Put in Savage and Presnell's terms, a final project might produce a new community narrative that was not in the mind of researchers as they identified an area of concern or opportunity. Notwithstanding the benefits of measuring impacts via the MSC technique, students engaging in DMin final projects need to state a purpose of their study and identify signs of success for the ministry intervention implemented. If the project uses co-researchers, appropriate signs of success (specific goals for the project) might only be identified after considerable discussion.

DMin students face three challenges in setting up a process to evaluate the success or impact of a final doctoral project when using a qualitative approach. First, in many cases, the participants in a study are members of the congregation served by the student-researcher. They all were recruited by the researcher and may well be supporters of the pastor and the pastor's ministry, full stop. Thus, when asked how well a project "worked," participants might soft-pedal the negative and accentuate the positive. The halo effect, as this mechanism is sometimes called, can operate subconsciously (Forgas and Laham 2007). A second challenge in evaluating the success of a project is discerning the depth or importance of any changes identified by participants. To put it another way, what does it mean when study participants make assertions like "These sermons changed my life," or "I can't begin to tell you how much I enjoyed the retreats that our pastor led." This challenge is related, finally, to the difficulty of determining long-term impacts from final doctoral projects. This evaluative problem is baked into the project, since students typically write reports and graduate within

a year of the end of the ministry intervention portion of the project. The long-term impact, by definition, can only be measured after the passage of time. As Sensing puts it, "although beneficial, longitudinal studies are not practical for DMin students who routinely start and finish their interventions within a year" (Sensing 2011, 72 footnote 46).

How can a DMin student overcome these challenges for final projects? To overcome the halo effect, the DMin student should design evaluative procedures that, as much as possible, do not ask study participants to make comments directly about the pastor. Procedures should also ask for specific opinions rather than global judgements. For instance, if the student wants to evaluate the effectiveness of a series of retreats, participants might use rubrics (see chapter 7) to examine the effectiveness of various aspects of the retreats. A more drastic way to counter the halo effect is to conduct the study with persons that do not know the minister-researcher and are not invested in making a good impression. For instance, if a student wants to test a Sunday school curriculum, it could be used by teachers in several congregations, not just the student's own. By recruiting study participants more widely, the effects of pre-existing relationships between the researcher and study participants would be minimized.

> **Thought Problem** What are other ways to address the challenges of evaluating DMin projects so that the evaluation is about the effectiveness of the ministry intervention and not a test of the evaluator's affection for the project's author?

Excursus: Must a Final Project Include a Ministry Intervention?

The practice of centering DMin final projects around a ministry intervention goes back to the birth of the DMin degree (Lincoln 1999). As we saw earlier in this chapter, research methods books whose audience is DMin students also give pride of place to some kind of ministry intervention—the "project in the project." However, neither the old nor the new ATS standards explicitly requires that a project implement a ministry intervention. The current standard states that a project should contribute new knowledge about the practice of ministry (as understood by Christians or Jews). The large-scale project headed by Jackson Carroll to describe the work of Catholic and Protestant pastoral leaders in the United States used mixed methods to address large research questions, including: "Who are American clergy? What do they do? How are they faring?" (Carroll and McMillan 2006, ix). This project surely created new knowledge about the practice of ministry, yet the researchers did not intervene in the lives of study participants beyond having structured conversations with them. On a much smaller scale, the final doctoral project of DMin student Rev. Ralph Hawkins (2014) examined how members of his congregation listened to sermons. This project used a phenomenological approach rather than a ministry intervention. The project is important to ministers who preach sermons because it provides data from real people about the experience of listening to sermons, thus increasing knowledge about one important aspect of ministry. The enduring paradox (if not contradiction) of DMin education is that often students feel expected to demonstrate a breadth of competency in a final doctoral project that is not asked of those completing a PhD dissertation—a degree which has more rigorous formal standards and which is held in higher regard by many leaders of theological seminaries. In my view, DMin final projects using a phenomenological or liberationist approach can enhance knowledge of the practice of ministry just as well as projects that use a project approach.

Some seminaries give students options for the design of final projects that do not require a ministry intervention. For instance, Dallas Theological Seminary affirms that final DMin projects may be conducted using one of four models: a descriptive survey of a ministry situation; development and evaluation of a new program; evaluation and response to an existing program; and the case study of a ministry situation (Dallas Theological Seminary 2018). The first and fourth models use, in the terminology of this book, a phenomenological approach. Only the second model asks students to implement and assess the effectiveness of a new ministry intervention. The third approach requires evaluation of an existing program, which might open the way for a student to evaluate intended and unintended impacts of a program over time. Of course, DMin students reading this book are governed by the expectations of their respective schools.

Thought Problem What do you want to accomplish in your own final project? Is implementing a ministry intervention at the heart of your ideas? How does the intention to make a ministry intervention affect the design of your study, including research questions and techniques for gathering data?

Theological Reflection

Because a DMin final project attends to ministerial problems, it is inherently concerned with theological reflection. As Bell (2012, 49) put it, "The project blends theology and ministry." Students typically start the project with a theological analysis. In terms of the cycle of practical theology, students identify a tentative theological answer to the questions posed by culture and specific needs or opportunities in a ministry setting. This tentative answer informs the design of the ministry intervention that the researcher-practitioner undertakes. After the intervention is finished, the researcher reflects theologically on the outcomes of the project in conversation with the theological framework chosen at the beginning. As Sensing (2011, 230) notes, this is how iterative cycles of ministry practice work; the only difference for DMin students is that they are reflecting on a precise ministry intervention.

Thought Experiment If you are beginning a final project, what is your theological framework? (If you are not engaged in such a project, imagine that you will.) How did you choose the framework or theological conversation partner? Who helped you make the decision?

The precise shape that theological reflection takes in a final project depends on the nature of the research questions, the results of the project, and the theological framework chosen at the start of the project. For instance, if my project uses the framework of Catholic social teaching and is intended to deepen understanding of that teaching, I might evaluate the project first by scorekeeping (testing), noting that participants' knowledge of topic A was measurably deepened, but knowledge of topic B was not. On the other hand, if my project asked what aspects of participant experience resonated with a consistently pro-life ethic, the findings would be more complex (testimonies rather than test scores). In either case, my theological reflection would, in the first instance, harken back to the Catholic Church's social teachings.

In terms of the arc of research for qualitative research studies, interpreting findings theologically is a specific form of sense making. A researcher typically thinks about what findings mean in terms of previous research findings and theories. Thinking about what findings mean theologically is, in this sense, a form of theorizing. In DMin final projects, students typically choose a theological framework at the start of the project. In the final report, students are obligated to relate findings to that framework. It is also possible that reflection could lead students to conclude that their theological framework did not seem to "fit" their data and that another framework might have more explanatory power. Think about the hypothetical situations in the following exercise. Jot down your ideas before reading my comments below.

Exercise: Thinking Theologically about Unexpected Findings

- In a final project about Christian stewardship, the researcher grounds the project in theological understanding that financial gifts made to his congregation are expressions of "heartfelt devotion to the God who is so good to us" (Powell 2006, 12). The ministry intervention was a series of sermons about giving and two retreats, whose purpose was to help congregations think about stewardship as a response to God. After the intervention, only a few participants reported that they understood stewardship as a response to God. The vast majority said that stewardship was a mechanism to pay for things related to the mission of the congregation like the light bill and the minister's salary.
- In a final project focusing on education for nonviolence rooted in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5), the researcher discovered that approximately one third of participants stated that they felt more inclined to resolve problems nonviolently than before taking classes on nonviolence (the project's ministry intervention). But, after the completion of classes, approximately half of participants stated that the Bible authorizes them to protect their lives and property by any means necessary. Forty percent of participants told the researcher in interviews that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, not the author of a social justice program.

In both hypothetical cases, the DMin student discovered that study participants by and large were not moved in the direction that the researcher intended by the ministry intervention. In the first case, participants' understanding of stewardship focused on "paying the bills" rather than being moved by grace. In reflecting theologically on these outcomes, the student might decide that the theological framework used is sound but there was a failure in teaching or coaching. Another possibility would be to take participant feedback into account and more carefully interrogate the researcher's theological framework. For instance, Powell argues that one part of financial giving to a congregation is for the support of its ministries (paying the bills). Beyond this level of giving should come sacrificial giving (Powell 2006, 129–52). For Powell, both paying the bills and sacrificial giving are rooted in God's love for people. To put it another way, the findings of the study fit with the student's theological framework, but only when the subtlety of the framework is explored more fully. Of course, a thoughtful student might also reflect on what ministers need to do to help move congregants from basic giving (let's pay the bills) to sacrificial giving. It is also possible that a student might argue that the findings of the study support a revision to the theological framework. In the world of practical theology, this is often called critical correlation or mutual correlation (Hiltner 1958; Tracy 1975; Whitehead and Whitehead 1990) because empirical findings and changes in the cultural situation challenge commonly held understandings of what the

Christian tradition says and what that tradition should mean. The decisions of my denomination, for instance, to begin ordaining women to ministry in the 1970s and to affirm the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered persons in the life of the church are examples of critical correlation at work. In this case, the student might discover that congregants who said that stewardship is mostly about paying the bills are having difficulty paying the household bills. She might therefore criticize Powell's framework for assuming that Christians in general have enough money to take care of their family's financial needs, the basic needs of the church, and still have surplus that they may share sacrificially.

In the second example, most participants appeared not to want to live as the meek peacemakers described by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, despite their participation in the researcher's classes on nonviolence. Our hypothetical student no doubt knows from studying the history of interpretation of the Matthew chapter 5 that interpreters have understood Jesus's words in the fifth chapter of Matthew in a broad variety of ways (Greenman, Larsen, and Spencer 2007). The notion that the sermon states guidelines for all Christians to follow is one interpretation among many. My point in the context of the need for theological reflection in final projects is not to suggest the doctrinally correct or best theological moves to make. Our hypothetical student might find other biblical and theological sources to undergird reflection on why some study participants were not transformed by the researcher's ministry intervention. Rather, my point is that students should reflect theologically on findings even when the findings do not appear to be consistent with the theological framework chosen at the start of the project.

Thought Problem In the previous exercise, the results were written as if the DMin student was surprised that the results turned out the way that they did. How does a minister's knowledge about his or her congregation shape expectations for a final project?

The Final Project Process

To conclude this chapter, the steps of the final project process from proposal approval to written report are discussed (for a fuller account, see Sensing 2011). Each school has its own process spelled out in its DMin handbook or other documents, of course. Students engaged in their own final projects should feel comfortable ignoring what I say in favor of doing what your faculty asks of you. This discussion is intended to highlight how students receive helpful feedback for their project at key points. My presentation is informed by reviewing the final project process of several theological seminaries, who are named and thanked in the acknowledgements at the end of this book. In a nutshell, the final project process has five parts:

1. Creating a written proposal
2. Refinement and approval of the proposal by school officials
3. Execution of the ministry intervention (if applicable) and data collection
4. Writing the final report
5. Oral evaluation

Proposal or Prospectus

Students begin their final doctoral project by writing a proposal. This document may also be called a prospectus or a topic approval form. The proposal includes many elements familiar from our discussion of the qualitative research process. Students need to state a research problem of workable size. Students report what others have said about the topic (literature review). Students also commonly explain their personal stake in the issue, which often arises out of their ministry context. The proposal includes a theological or biblical analysis of the problem. This part of the proposal specifies a theological framework or conversation partners that the student will engage in the project. The proposal also discusses methods, how study participants will be recruited, and a timeline for completion of the whole project. The prospectus also may require students to submit samples of recruiting messages and consent forms. If the project includes a ministry intervention, the student provides the details.

At some seminaries, students work on their final project proposal as part of a class. Typically, students are assigned (or successfully invite) a faculty member to be their advisor for the project as they write their proposals. The terminology used to describe the faculty member who works with a DMin student as she completes her final project varies. Some schools call this person a supervisor, an advisor, or thesis advisor. At other schools, the person is called a reader. Some seminaires have first and second readers. Sometimes, the DMin director provides direction during the proposal stage. By the time a student has written a proposal, she has done the hard work of refining a topic, seeing what others have written about it, thought through a strategy for data collection, and decided on a ministry intervention (if applicable). A great deal of intellectual work has been accomplished.

Approval of the Proposal

The written proposal is reviewed and formally approved by the appropriate persons at the school, including the institutional review board (IRB). The approval process may be iterative. That is, a student might be asked to explain data collection procedures more fully to the IRB, be asked to scale down the scope of the project, or be required to revise the timeline. Based on my experience with final projects, students are sunny optimists about how quickly they can complete projects. Ministry and life frequently slow down progress. The approval process is extremely helpful to students. The process may include a committee whose only knowledge of the student's ideas is what the student has put down in writing in her project proposal. If the draft does not communicate to the committee clearly, the student can edit the document and clarify her own thinking in the process. Approval implies that the faculty thinks that the topic and methods described meet its standards for rigor. Sometimes schools refer to the approved proposal as a kind of contract: the student is promising to deliver a project as described and the faculty is agreeing to receive the project as acceptable for completion of the degree.

Doing the Project

Once a student has received approval to conduct her study, the hard work of recruiting participants, engaging in a ministry intervention (if applicable), data collection, and interpretation begins. Despite having received official sanction to go forth and prosper, doing the project sometimes has echoes of the biblical wanderings of Israel in the wilderness for forty long years. To paraphrase more than one student working on a final project, "I was doing fine

and then life happened." DMin students working on their final projects are typically serving a congregation on a full-time basis. They may also be raising children. Sometimes they or their family members face health crises. Sometimes they get divorced. Sometimes the congregation that seemed the ideal setting for the project becomes embroiled in controversy. A task force of the Association of Theological Schools put it this way: "DMin directors report that students frequently experience difficulties in completing the required written summative project due to the realities of pastoral ministry and the challenges of doctoral research and writing" (DMin Identity Peer Group, 4).

> **Thought Experiment** What resources does your school provide to help you complete a final project? What promises can you and your project advisor make to each other to help you finish your project?

Students need to trust the process as they labor through the steps of their final projects. Novice researchers should expect there to be periods of frustration (e.g., it takes more time to conduct interviews than accounted for in a timeline). Above all else, students should not expect that they will complete every aspect of their data collection as proposed in their prospectus. A plan to interview six participants three times each turns out to be too ambitious, and the student only interviews five participants three times and four twice. Such setbacks do not mar the integrity of the project. In all cases, the final report will note how many participants actually took part and how the researcher collected data. Students should be proactive with project supervisors when they encounter problems. (To any faculty members reading this text I make the same appeal: keep in touch with students working on final projects.) As I have noted previously, it takes time to make sense of findings after data collection. Many successful DMin students have used professional development time to get away from their day-to-day responsibilities to conduct intensive writing retreats to push through to the end of their projects.

Writing the Project Report

Students will be expected to complete writing assignments based on the schedule agreed to in their proposals. Faculty at some schools provide feedback on sections of the project report as they are written rather than providing a surfeit of notes to students all at once. This iterative approach helps students realize that a large report is written in sections over time, not all at once. Schools provide clear directions on how to organize the final report. For instance, some schools stress reflexivity in reports and ask students to write part or all of the report in the first person rather than the scholarly third person. Because of the length of most reports, they are organized into chapters. The formal prospectus or proposal forms the basis of the first two chapters. The outline below shows a common outline for a final project report.

DMin Final Project Report

Abstract
The student writes a one-page abstract that briefly describes methods and focuses on findings of the project.

Chapter 1: Introduction
The student introduces the ministry problem, including a statement of personal

interest. The student describes the context for the project and introduces research questions.

Chapter 2: Theological Analysis
The student describes a theological framework for thinking about the ministry problem.

Chapter 3: Methods and Ministry Intervention
The student describes the research methods used, including how study participants were chosen. Because many faculty members are not trained in qualitative research methods, students are often expected to provide enough details about methods for all faculty readers to understand why the chosen techniques fit the project. The chapter also describes the ministry intervention (if applicable), relating it to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Findings
The student describes the results of the project as answers to research questions. Discussion of findings includes anything unexpected (challenges in recruiting enough participants, the need to change the number of interviews, etc.).

Chapter 5: Evaluation and Theological Reflection
The student draws conclusions about the effectiveness of the ministry intervention, if applicable (i.e., she evaluates the project) and interprets findings using theological reflection. The findings should be discussed in conversation with previous research. The student may write reflexively about what impact that the study made on her. The student suggests areas for further research and how the study might shape the practice of ministry.

Appendices
The student provides examples of the consent form used, detailed interview protocols, survey questions, and whatever other background material that thesis advisors require as appendices.

The outline for a project report should look familiar. It is very much like a format of scholarly journal articles. A key difference, however, is the length. In final projects, the student is required to report on findings in more depth than the page limits of a journal article allows. Thus, the student can provide rich detail via quotations. Students can muse about meanings and argue with their favorite theologians. Students should remember that many elements of the project proposal can be upcycled into the final project report as parts of the first three chapters. At the same time, a final project report may be the longest piece of academic writing that a DMin student ever attempts. Because good writing involves writing a draft, setting it aside, and making revisions, successful DMin students allocate more time than they think they will need in their project schedule for writing. (For a deeper discussion of writing final reports, see Vyhmeister and Robertson 2020, 107–16). In my experience, students who nurture relationships with their project supervisors during the research and writing process are more likely to get moral support and helpful feedback about draft chapters than students who do not reach out. We all like to think that we are good writers and that the text we send to our project advisor will be clear and require only minor revisions. While that is the experience for some DMin students, for others, the process of writing the final project will require significant revisions to parts of the report. In my experience, project supervisors prefer that students make these changes in advance of the oral presentation. Some

schools ask students to submit one chapter at a time to their project advisor or readers and make changes before continuing to submit subsequent chapters. Although this process may seem odd (after all, students don't get a chance to rewrite most academic papers for classes), it is common when students write theses, dissertations, and final DMin projects because these reports should make a contribution to the knowledge basis of a discipline.

> **Thought Problem** How do your seminary's expectations for the written final project report differ from the outline sketched here? What does your school emphasize in final doctoral projects?

The Oral Presentation

In accordance with ATS standards, students completing final doctoral projects make an oral presentation. Requirements for this exercise vary widely. In some cases, the student makes a long formal presentation followed by skeptical questions. (Supply your own horror story about "defending" a project here.) Such presentations can be challenging because of the need to summarize a year or more's hard work into a half-hour talk using twenty-five PowerPoint slides. At other schools, students are given a list of oral examination questions in advance, some of which might not be about the project. Students should follow the guidance of their project advisors in preparing for these presentations. For instance, sometimes, the student is told simply to talk about their most important learning from the project, on the grounds that faculty members have carefully read the student's report. The recently revised standard states that students may be orally evaluated about the breadth of their learning in the program, not just the project itself. Ask questions about what to expect. Be prepared. Know your school's culture.

Successful completion of the oral examination marks approval of a student's work in the DMin program. It is common practice for reports to be approved pending minor revisions noted during the oral examination and given in writing to the student. In some settings, a completed and approved final project report is sent to a professional editor who corrects inconsistencies in citations or grammatical errors. Many schools require students to submit the approved version of their final project report for accession to the school's library. Students will be given guidance on formatting requirements. The final project report is the intellectual property of the student. Under the laws of the United States, the student owns the copyright.

Conclusion

A DMin final project is a work of practical theology. It engages a ministry concern using social science methods. Frequently, projects focus on determining the impact of a ministry intervention such as a series of retreats or classes. Before a student begins to collect data or implement her ministry intervention in a final project, school leaders approve a proposal describing the project in detail. The approved proposal serves as a set of promises from the student to the school detailing how the student will recruit participants, conduct the ministry intervention, and interpret the results. The approved proposal is also an implicit promise from the faculty that a project executed as described will be acceptable. The report on the

project contains some of the same information as the proposal. Students change from writing in the future tense (this project will do X) in the proposal to the past tense (In this project I did X and Y) in the project report. Project reports engage in theological reflection. In some settings, the student's reflexive comments about conducting the project are an important aspect of the project report. Once students have completed the final report, they are orally evaluated about the project and their mastery of other aspects learning in the program.

CHAPTER 11: KEY POINTS

» The culminating project in a DMin program produces new knowledge about ministerial practice.

» DMin students typically produce a project proposal. After approval by faculty, the student implements the project.

» DMin projects emphasize explicit theological reflection. Such reflection should take seriously the findings of the study, even when they surprise the student or appear at odds with the student's theological framework.

» Students evaluate the effectiveness of a final project based on its goals and the research questions of the study.

» The timeline for a final doctoral project should include adequate time to make sense of findings (interpretation) and write the final report.

» A student writing final projects should be guided in all things by the guidance of the school's DMin handbook and her supervisor's suggestions.

PART 4 SUMMARY

» The researcher's task is not complete when she has finished collecting data.

» Qualitative researchers find patterns in data by systematically reviewing interview transcripts, field notes, and written artifacts. This process is called coding.

» The researcher clearly distinguishes what participants said and did from the researcher's interpretations of words and events.

» Scholarly writings of qualitative research studies succinctly report on methods and focus on presenting findings and their meaning.

» A final Doctor of Ministry project has distinctive expectations associated with the learning outcomes of the degree. These projects are explicitly theological.

» The researcher's ethical obligations to study participants includes how the researcher describes participants and their lives in reports and presentations.

Afterword

In this book, I have introduced readers to the mindset and methods of qualitative research. I have, more than I initially thought that I would, written about how qualitative research can contribute to doing practical theology. To put it another way, I have tried to show how the researcher's commitments and intersectionality matter in a study even when the researcher does her best to bracket those beliefs while collecting data. I hope that I have provided enough conceptual background to understand the distinctive philosophical worries and language games of social scientists and theologians but not so much that you lost track of the main lines of thought. I have focused on making the book like a good cookbook, in that I provided options for research methods (analogous to recipes) and discussed the nuts and bolts of using those methods (analogous to discussions of the difference between roasting and frying). This book is, in an odd way, a kind of intellectual memoir about how I learned to do qualitative research. Your own journey may be quite different from mine. I hope that my text helps you to make different mistakes than the ones that I made.

I also hope that I have stretched the reader's imagination enough to become aware that who you are as a researcher matters in the research process. Theological schools, in my experience, spend a great deal of time working with students to help them become emotionally aware of themselves and of the need to distinguish clearly between their own inner lives and the challenges of people to whom they minister. When I was in divinity school in the 1970s, we were constantly identifying our "personal baggage" and were continually exhorted not to hand it off to parishioners or clients to carry. So, too, the competent qualitative researcher needs to acknowledge and bracket what is hers so that she can attend to the lifeworlds of others.

I want to thank those who have made writing this book possible and those who have made it better. There is quite a list.

I am grateful to the leadership of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary—especially its Board of Trustees, President Theodore J. Wardlaw, and Academic Dean David H. Jensen—for granting me a sabbatical in 2020 to complete this work. I am grateful to the staff of the Stitt Library of Austin Seminary—Kristy Sorensen, Mandy Dean, John Vinke, and David

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I am thankful to many mentors who shaped my understanding of qualitative research, especially Novell Northcutt, who taught me how to do interactive qualitative analysis. His course in my PhD program at the University of Texas at Austin made me fall in love with research. Thanks to the many unknown peer reviewers who offered helpful notes to manuscripts that I submitted to journals over the years. You made me think more clearly.

I offer special thanks to colleagues at the Association of Theological Schools, especially Dr. Debbie Creamer, Dr. Helen Blier, and Dr. Tisa Lewis. They helped me see the diversity of theological education and the variety of ways that school leaders think about their work. Serving on accreditation committees has profoundly shaped my understanding of what it means to have achievable, measurable goals.

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Most importantly, I thank my wife Laura Lincoln for her daily support as I completed writing the book at home on Blursday, 2020.

Glossary

This glossary defines technical terms used in this book.

B

beneficence

The ethical principle, identified in the Belmont Report, that research conducted with human subjects should do no harm and maximize possible benefits.

C

coding

The identification and marking of qualitative research data to determine themes. Coding is part of data analysis. The two types of coding are **coding to theory** and **free coding**.

coding to theory

The use of a theory as a guide for identifying and marking words or phrases in qualitative research data. In coding to theory, a specific theory is chosen early in the research process.

correlation (theology)

A method of theological reflection that understands theology as a conversation between culture on the one hand and Christian doctrine and experience on the other hand. This method underlies the work of practical theologians.

D

data

The information obtained by qualitative researchers via interviews, focus groups, observations, or questionnaires.

data analysis

The work of taking large amounts of raw data (e.g., interview transcripts) and determining more precisely and succinctly what participants said or did.

data interpretation

The work of determining the meanings or reasons why study participants said or did what the researcher captured in her data. While **data analysis** focuses on finding patterns in large amounts of data, data interpretation wants to get at reasons and meanings.

data management

The ongoing work of the researcher to collect and store data about all research activities in ways that protect study participants and keep data useful to the researcher.

descriptive statistics

Summaries of numeric data to communicate accurately and succinctly to readers. Examples of descriptive statistics are **measures of central tendency**. By contrast, inferential statistics seek to authorize conclusions about what would be numerically true of a large population from a much smaller sample.

doctrine as theory

The use of a Christian teaching as a framework for understanding the behavior or ideas of a group of participants in a qualitative research study. A researcher might use the doctrine as a basis for coding data.

E

ethnography

An approach to the study of human culture using **participant observation** as a key data gathering technique. Writing about such a study is also called an ethnography.

evaluation

The systematic determination of the extent to which a ministry intervention achieved its intended effects. The researcher should describe her evaluation plan at the start of a study.

F

field notes

Written or digitally recorded comments made by a qualitative researcher about study participants or possible interpretations of data. In ethnography, field notes are prized for the rich detail that they capture about the social world of study participants.

focus group

A group interview led by a researcher for the purposes of collecting qualitative data.

free coding

The identification and marking of **qualitative research** data for themes without any preconceptions about what is of interest to the researcher. Free coding stands in contrast to **coding to theory**.

G

gatekeeper

A person or individual who has the ability to grant or withhold permission for a researcher to conduct research with potential study participants. For instance, the congregational leadership council or pastor might be able to stop a researcher from conducting observational research.

H

hypothesis

In a social science study, a formal statement of what the researcher expects to find, made before data are collected. Typically, researchers pose hypotheses based on findings of previous research.

I

implications of research findings

The possible consequences for practice that a researcher identifies based on the results of a study. The determination of implications is a creative act of the researcher.

informed consent

The ethical obligation of researchers to explain to potential study participants basic information about the study, including potential harm, and to receive affirmation (usually in writing) from participants of their willingness to take part in a study.

institutional review board (IRB)

A committee of a school or research organization authorized to grant or deny permission for researchers to conduct studies with human subjects. An IRB's purpose is to protect study participants from harm.

intersectionality

The analytic observation that a human being has multiple commitments and grounds of identity that inform beliefs and actions.

interview protocol

The series of questions that a qualitative researcher asks study participants. An interview protocol disciplines the researcher to ask the same key questions of each interviewee.

J

justice

The ethical principle, identified in the Belmont Report, that research conducted with human subjects should not be conducted with persons from a group unlikely to benefit from the results.

L

liberationist approach to research

The approach to qualitative research characterized by the desire to change the world for the better. A researcher using this approach typically indicates how their theological and ideological values have shaped the study.

literature review

The researcher's careful reading and analysis of studies and theoretical frameworks pertinent to a given qualitative research study. The literature review describes both the intellectual work of examining previous research and the part of a written article or project that critically summarizes what the researcher found.

M

measures of central tendency

In **descriptive statistics**, these are calculated numerical summarizes that characterize most of a data set. These measures include the mean, median, and mode.

methods or methodology

Specific techniques of data collection used in **qualitative research**. For example, **participant observation** is a method.

ministry intervention

A set of activities in the final Doctor of Ministry project by which the pastor/researcher attempts to improve some aspect of congregational life or the Christian ministry.

O

observation

The systematic collection of data from study participants made by a trained researcher without asking questions. A more demanding form of observation is **participant observation**.

observation protocol

An instrument (checklist) used by qualitative researchers to help the researcher attend to all pertinent aspects of a phenomenon being observed.

operationalize

The task of precisely defining characteristics in a study. For instance, a researcher wanting to interview "young" pastors needs to define how old a person is to be reckoned as "young." The virtue of operationalizing characteristics is consistency.

P

participant observation

The systematic collection of data by a researcher who takes part in some of the activities of the group being studied. This technique is commonly used by anthropologists.

phenomenological approach to research

The approach to **qualitative research** characterized by the desire to understand better the experiences of persons or groups.

pool

The group of individuals whose characteristics fit the research needs of a researcher. For instance, a researcher who wants to interview members of a congregation's social justice advocacy committee has a smaller pool of possible study participants than a researcher who wants to interview members of the same congregation.

positionality

The relationship of the researcher to study participants, characterized by the researcher's role as an outsider, an expert, and a guest. Positionality is a special instance of **intersectionality**.

practical theology

The branch of Christian theology that is concerned with the experiences of believers. Practical theologians typically use a form of **correlation** as their method. They commonly employ data gathering techniques used by qualitative researchers.

project approach to research

The approach to **qualitative research** that includes a set of activities. In this approach, the researcher evaluates the effectiveness or impact of these activities.

purposive sampling

The widely used technique of qualitative researchers that chooses participants for a study based on their appropriate characteristics. This approach stands in contrast to **random sampling**.

Q

qualitative research

A form of social science research concerned with the richness and subtleties of human experience.

quantitative research

A form of social science research concerned with determining relationships between factors in human behavior using statistical reasoning.

R

random sampling

A technique used in **quantitative research** to insure that the characteristics of a small group of study participants (the sample) are the same as they would be if the researcher could study everyone in the relevant population.

research question

In a qualitative study, an focused area of inquiry about which the researcher collects data. Research questions are written differently depending on the research approach (**phenomenological**, **liberationist**, or **project**) used in the study.

respect

The ethical principle, identified in the Belmont Report, that research conducted with human subjects should always be based on fundamental concern for the wellbeing of study participants.

rubric

A method for evaluating performance in a segmented way using a standard set of criteria. Rubrics may be helpfully used to collect data in the **project approach** to **qualitative research** often used by Doctor of Ministry students.

S

strong view of consent

The view of **informed consent** that contends that individuals that volunteer to take part in qualitative studies have agency. Therefore, they should be told the particulars of the study and the researcher should engage them in conversation about any ethical concerns that arise during the course of the study. This view stands in contrast to the **weak view of consent**.

survey question

A question posed in a context where the researcher cannot ask follow-up questions. Examples of survey questions include asking about one's age or one's level of agreement or disagreement with a statement.

synthetic quotations

Carefully edited compilations of direct discourse from study participants about a specific topic. A researcher may write such creations to better understand the experiences of study participants or to provide vividness to the final written project.

T

theory

An explanation for research findings. In **qualitative research**, a theory commonly explains a pattern in social life.

W

weak view of consent

The view of **informed consent** that contends that individuals that volunteer to take part in qualitative studies are likely to trust the researcher and therefore do not need to be told all the particulars about the study. This view stands in contrast to the **strong view of consent**.

Wesleyan quadrilateral

A way of understanding Christian theology as the interplay between reason, Scripture, tradition, and experience.

Appendix A

Sample Consent Form, Class Project

Introduction: My name is [insert name], and I am a student at [name of school]. I am conducting research for my Doctor of Ministry seminar on methods in advanced qualitative research. My phone number is ____________. My email is ___________________. My instructor is [instructor' name]. Her phone number is [phone number]. Her email address is [email address]. Please contact either of us at any time if you have questions about this study.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to study [insert topic]. I am trying to learn more about [my topic]. The results of this research will only be shared in a paper read by the instructor.

Procedure: I am asking you to agree to participate in a focus group lasting no more than ninety (90) minutes.

Audio Recordings (Check if applicable):___ I will make an audio recording of the sessions. I will delete the recording once I have completed my paper for the course.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate in the focus group and then change your mind, you may stop participating. You do not need to offer an explanation.

Risks, Confidentiality, and Benefits: There are no known risks associated with this study. The student will not collect any individually identifying information except for this consent form, which will be kept separate from other research materials. If I quote something said in the group in my paper, I will use a pseudonym rather than an actual name. While there are no guaranteed benefits for your participation, you may enjoy the event or find it meaningful.

Disposition of Consent Forms: I will retain written copies of consent forms in a locked file cabinet and dispose of the consent forms three years after the completion of my research.

By signing this form, you agree to participate in this research project with all conditions noted above. Be sure that any questions you have are answered to your full satisfaction before signing this document. If you agree to participate in this study, a copy of this document will be given to you for your records.

Participant's signature______________________________________

Date____________________

Print Name________________________________

Researcher's signature______________________________________

Date____________________

Appendix B

Guided Imagery for a DLN Focus Group

This example of guided imagery was used by a Doctor of Ministry student to discover categories of interest to congregational members on the topic of Christian stewardship. The student used the procedures for a DLN focus group described in chapter 5. The study participants were members of the congregation of which he was the pastor. What is helpful about these images? How might you add or subtract elements to help focus group participants think about their experiences of stewardship?

As we think together about stewardship, let's begin by first pausing and clearing our minds. Please close your eyes and take a deep breath. Set aside whatever thoughts or stresses you came with today. Think of a time or times when you gave of yourself to the church. A time when you used your gifts and talents. ***[pause]***

What did you do? Maybe you had a skill that no one else could give? Or a perspective that was desperately needed? Maybe it was a one-time event. Or possibly it is something you have done many, many times. ***[pause]***

What does it feel like to give of your talent? ***[pause]***

Think of a moment where you gave that most precious of resources: your time. Was it a moment where you had it to give? Or was it a sacrifice? Were you glad that you could give? Or stressed by it? How does it feel to give of your time? ***[pause]***

Think of your decision to give financially to the church. What factors went into the decision? ***[pause]***

Was it a decision ruled by obligation, or freedom and grace? Do you see it as a sacrifice? Or just another commitment? ***[pause]***

How does giving financially make you feel?

You may open your eyes.

Tell me about stewardship.

Write down as many words or phrases that come to mind, one word or phrase per card.

Appendix C

Guided Imagery for a DLN Focus Group

Appendix C provides a second example of guided imagery. I used this text to lead a group of Church of Christ ministers at the start of a focus group. The text in brackets formed the outline of my imagery, but I didn't speak those words aloud. I find it helpful to write down the stage direction pause so that I do not unfold the imagery too quickly. Guided imagery works best when participants are allowed to marinade in their thoughts without being rushed.

Now that we have finished the preliminaries about our topic, I invite you to close your eyes as we begin to think about your life and work as a minister serving a congregation.

[The weekly calendar]

Let's begin by thinking about what you did last week, starting on Monday and ending on Sunday. Let your mind visit what you have written on your desk calendar or on your phone . . . ***[pause]***

What were you doing on Tuesday morning? Wednesday night? ***[pause]***

Was there a day off last week? ***[pause]***

Sunday morning: What was going on? What were you doing? What were you hoping would happen? ***[pause]***

Think about those tasks that you put on your schedule. ***[pause]***

[What's going well in your congregation?]

Now, think about the congregation that you serve:

The younger & the older; [pause]

Those who volunteer a lot and those who don't [pause]

Their small triumphs and everyday problems [pause]

What's going well in the congregation? Do you see signs that God is at work with these folks? [pause]

[Starting out versus now]

Now, turn your attention to when you were just starting out in ministry. [pause]

What was it like? What was exciting? What was hard? [pause]

Come forward in time to your present life and work. What is exciting now? What is hard? [pause]

What has changed about your life from when you began to be a minister? [pause]

What things seem to be constant? [pause]

[What would recharging look like?]

Now imagine that someone who cares about you says: I bet you'd like some away time to recharge. Maybe an elder or a colleague in ministry says this.

Think about what would revitalize you. [pause]

[More]

I am sure that other aspects of your ministry are occurring to you. That's fine. Let them arise in your mind. [pause]

Now, open your eyes. **Tell me about being a minister serving a congregation.**

Write down one word or phrase per card.

Appendix D

Naming, Refining & Defining Themes from a DLN Focus Group

Using a DLN focus group approach, it is important to name and define themes well because they form the content of the interview protocol. That is, interviews with individuals comprise a series of open-ended questions phrased as "Tell me about A. . . B. . . C. . ."

The names of themes that emerge are typically broad, allowing individuals to talk about their own experiences along a continuum. The researcher/interviewer does not signal to participants that the researcher is more (or less) interested in responses along one part of the continuum in preference to those in the middle or the other extreme.

Common Problems with Draft Names of Themes

Here is a list of common problems with proposed names of themes.

1. **Too specific.** If the name is too specific, it may not be understandable to those outside of the focus group that created it. So "Listening" may be better than "Soakin' it up like a sponge."

2. **Vague or misleading.** In one study, the theme "campus environment" was defined as the buildings and grounds on campus. Participants interpreted it as "emotional atmosphere among students and faculty." So, I changed the name to "facilities." Feminist theologians refer to "the power of naming." After seeing how interviews could go in odd directions because I said "Tell me about X" instead of "Tell me about Y [where Y is a synonym of X]," I was convicted that the power of naming was more pervasive, subtle, and powerful than I had thought.

3. **Too technical.** Terms like soteriology or even Christology may be murky jargon for persons who have not gone to graduate school in Christian theology. Remember, you can interpret findings in your study (i.e., after interviews) using theological terms as needed. You don't need to use technical terms in an interview protocol with non-experts.

4. **Sits on one side of a continuum.** You want to give permission to individuals to have their own (minority) opinions. So "satisfaction with my car" is a better theme than "car happiness" because you want people to be able to report low and high levels of satisfaction.

5. **Value judgment.** Theme names like "negative emotions" may suggest that it's not OK for me to have any of them. "Brain-dead Liberals" and "Brain-dead Conservatives" are equally poor names for themes.

6. **Subtheme.** In a study about what Texas means to Texans, the tentative themes "Places in Austin," "Restaurants in Austin," and "Parks in Austin" may better be called "Places in Austin."

7. **Conjunctive.** Don't state or suggest a relationship between two themes. Let each theme stand on its own. Let participants make their own connections between themes as they will.

8. **Does not reflect text on cards.** Understand what's going on with your cards. Don't invent a theme that participants "should have" talked about.

Refining and Defining Themes

After a dump, lump, and name focus group, the researcher looks at the tentative names that participants gave to categories. She or he refines the names based on these eight things to avoid.

Put more positively, the researcher puts together some emerging themes that are subthemes of a plausible theme that was not named by the group. Similarly, the researcher combines emerging themes along a continuum.

The researcher should be worried if there seem to be more than a dozen themes. A finding like this suggests that more reflection is needed to combine themes, or that the overall phenomenon being studied is so complex that it would be better to focus on only some aspects of it.

The researcher also writes a succinct definition of the themes for use in individual interviews. Characteristics of good definitions:

- Avoid jargon
- Do not use the key word in the name of the theme in the sentence that elaborates the meaning of the theme. (Do *not* define Preaching as "how pastors preach sermons." A better definition is "how pastors prepare and deliver sermons.")
- To the extent possible, avoid value judgments. (The reason: you are creating themes and definitions to use during individual interviews in your study. You want participants to feel free to talk about their own experience without hints that certain parts of their experience are more or less interesting to the researcher. So, the definition of children's ministry should not be "babysitting little brats that Jesus loves.")
- Fit the scope of the study. (In a study about how students write research papers, it is appropriate that all of the definitions begin with "How students do . . ." because the researcher's focus of interest is students and no one else.

Note: These directions are based on class handouts by Norvell Northcutt and Danny McCoy, educational administration faculty at the University of Texas at Austin.

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Databank

Introduction

The databank provides supplementary material for use with this book.

To help novice researchers get a feel for qualitative research interview data, I have included four examples of transcribed interviews. These transcriptions include what I (the interviewer) said and what study participants (interviewees) said. In a classroom setting, these transcripts could be discussed to analyze such things as what the interviewer did well and what she might have done better (or at least differently). A student working through the textbook on her own might read these interviews in conjunction with chapter 5. I transcribed three of the transcripts. The interview with a Presbyterian faculty member was transcribed professionally by Verbalink.com.

The complete transcripts are:

- The Outlier
- The Highly Focused Participant
- A Presbyterian Faculty Member Talks about Ministry
- An Episcopal Faculty Member Talks about Ministry

I think that the best way to learn how to code transcripts is by practice. Complete interviews from the databank could be coded for subthemes. In addition, I have included several examples of data compilations from several study participants about a common theme. Students can further analyze these compilations to discover subthemes. The thematic compilations are:

- Overarching Message
- Call to Ministry
- Transformation

- Life Management
- Emotions
- Pastoral Identity
- Administration
- Leading

For my instructions on how to code transcripts, please see chapter 8. Although different researchers might code transcripts differently, I expect that everyone would identify some common subthemes in these data. The document "Check Your Coding" in the databank lists the subthemes that I discovered in these seven texts.

Databank

Transcript: The Outlier

This interview, held in November 2008, was part of my dissertation research. This interview has always stuck with me because this individual's responses, on almost every question, diverged the most from what other participants said. The interview protocol that I used contained the names and definitions of themes about being a student in seminary. These are the same themes that I used in the next interview, "The Highly Focused Participant."

Interviewer: I am interested in hearing your thoughts about the themes of being a student in seminary that focus groups discovered. To begin, tell me about the seminary's Academic Program.

Interviewee: My experience with the academic program is very minimal. Very early on, within the first semester, I learned intuitively or out of discernment, that there are certain things I should listen to and have value and certain things I shouldn't and don't have value. That's not to say they are not valuable pieces of information, but they are just things I couldn't take into practical ministry. I'm in high school ministry with young life, and I hit the pavement with North High School here in town a couple of times a week, and I have to be in students' lives and be in college students' lives to love on the other leaders on my team, so there's a lot of information that's completely inapplicable. And the shift for my academic focus throughout my entire time in seminary has been this—doing just enough to get by and get the grade, while at the same time having the bulk of materials, books, lectures, talks, sermons, and speakers that I absolutely love, who I considered infinitely, I would say exponentially more valuable, practical, and more realistic. So really, the bulk of my focus was, OK, how can I go through these motions to get my Master's degree, which I need, while at the same time investing a lot of my education into these other speakers, teachers, etc.

Interviewer: So, those other speakers and teachers, are not part of the seminary's program?

Interviewee: Correct.

Interviewer: OK. How do you find them?

Interviewee: A lot of it, it's like how people find good music, you know? Either through friends, through authors, through mentors, through people at my church, through word of mouth, even just hunting around for some of the classical stuff, I had a fun time this semester going through a lot of Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley. And just listening to some of their teachings and some of their sermons. And we did read a little bit of John Wesley for my Intro to Preaching class, but it wasn't nearly as fun as that kind of stuff we do.

Interviewer: Thanks. Next, please tell me about the theme School Bureaucracy.

Interviewee: Minimal. I just do what I need to do to get my classes to get admitted. Didn't really think twice more about it. It's just the process to go through.

Interviewer: Did you think it was a huge hassle?

Interviewee: No, it's actually efficient. I haven't had any issues with it. Kind of like lights and sound at a play when you are going to see theater, you only notice it if something's going bad. It's been clockwork.

Interviewer: Tell me about Call to Ministry.

Interviewee: I came to know Jesus Christ at age 19, like a lightning bolt, and was a new person in two days. Immediately after that I was called to Young Life, which is a high school evangelical outreach ministry. And I have been either leading or directly involved in Young Life as much as I could for the past 11 years. As of now, that call hasn't changed, and I consider myself very attentive to God and I really just put intimacy and time with Him in my relationship with him as primacy in my life. As of now, that calling has not been revoked or changed or moved to something else, so that remains. Until God gives me the green light to move out of that ministry, which I am welcome to do at any time, He's Lord and I'm not, He's welcome to. At the same time, I came to Christ at 19, my baptism of the Holy Spirit, the end of this past summer. Early September, maybe. So, had a whole new dynamic introduced to my ministry.

I did an internship at Hope Chapel, which is a charismatic, nondenominational church here in town. This semester I've seen a few signs, a few wonders—easily 15 to 20 spontaneous healings. Words of prophesy, words of knowledge, just some of the fun stuff you see in Acts. So it's offered a new dynamic into my walk and into my calling. I don't know exactly just where God is going to take me with that just yet. There's a possibility of maybe becoming a youth pastor within a charismatic church while still leading Young Life and being able to be a bridge between the church and a parachurch ministry. As of now, that's where I am in the ballgame.

Interviewer: Thank you. Tell me about Facilities.

Interviewee: No complaints. Community kitchen's fine. I've got my own dorm room. That's more than enough for me. Library's great. Everything on campus is close. Classrooms are fine. Chapel's fine. —I'd love to be able to take a shower and not have to dodge in hot water when someone flushes a toilet, but other than that, life's good.

Interviewer: Is there a community kitchen in your dorm?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So are you on the meal plan?

Interviewee: No. I buy my own and cook.

Interviewer: Anything else you want to say about facilities?

Interviewee: This library is awesome. The amount of texts I need for research, or just anything with regard to theological, biblical, in regard to God. It's amazing. I love it. So I'm coming back here after I graduate to do some exegesis and keep taking advantage of this place. It's a blessing.

Interviewer: Tell me about Church Requirements, the expectations that your denomination places on you as a seminary student.

Interviewee: As charismatic, non-denominational, I have none in regard to graduating from this seminary. So I don't have to take any polity courses. I don't have to take CPE if I don't want to. It's a blessing and a curse. The blessing is I'm really free to get my ecclesiastical endorsement from a number of organizations that I can essentially choose from. The disadvantage of that is it's a less formal and less recognized way to do it. Young Life often goes through an organization called Evangelical Church Alliance for ordination. It's the difference between getting hired for a job because you are in the family, or getting hired because you meet the requirements for a job. So, Young Life is this massive family of people in ministry. Some have been doing it generation after generation since it started. So the credit of me knowing someone, and them knowing someone goes so much further than did I pass the Greek, did I pass the Hebrew. So it's an issue of character, integrity, can I trust this person in ministry, is he credible, do I know him—that sort of thing. So my endorsement is going to hum around those circles, not the academic or committee or boards that I see a lot of the Presbyterian or Methodist students here stressing over.

Interviewer: Is there some kind of care committee that is sort of shepherding you through this process?

Interviewee: No. I have a Young Life area director who is over me, and loves on me, and a couple of other guys locally.

Interviewer: But your relationship with him is based on—you work with him?

Interviewee: Yeah, I'm a leader, he's a leader sort of thing. I have no group of people whose sole intent is to shepherd me. It's been a bit solo in that respect.

Interviewer: Is that OK?

Interviewee: Yeah, I love it. No complaints.

Interviewer: Thanks. Tell me about Community, the relationships between students.

Interviewee: I've had very little with students here at seminary for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, most of my time goes to Young Life. So if you were to say, Hey Jay, where's your family, where's your body of Christ, between Hope Church and Young Life is where I'm going to stand. There's my church home. And they're the places where I have nearly all of my relationships with leaders and mentors and students, and that sort of thing. So the bulk of my time, energy and relationships go to that community and Hope Chapel's community. The second thing about being evangelical charismatic here is there's not a whole lot of us around. So we have a bit of a subculture. There are a few charismatics here. We'll get together, we'll pray, we'll speak in tongues, we'll prophesy over each other. We'll do the fun stuff. We'll pray for healing, these sorts of things, but there's a sense that we can't take that out. We can't take that to the chapel.

Because this is a mainline, very liberal seminary, and sometimes our ideas are much more conservative. So it's a matter of two things. I don't want to impose that on someone who's not comfortable with that, speaking in tongues, raising my hands in worship, and dancing, which is some of the stuff you'll see at a charismatic church. Prophesying over people in the middle of the service. So I don't want to impose that on them, and I don't think it would be accepted in this place, by any means. I don't know why that is. It's difficult, too, because there are a lot of joys in my ministry. I had two students, two weeks ago, I gave the cross talk. I always give the cross talk at Young Life, and I just opened up, "if anyone is ready to bring their life to Christ, come talk to me," and I had two students give their lives to Christ after my cross talk. I can't come and celebrate that here. I can't tell that to the majority of people in my dorm. Maybe one or two people who are on the same page with me, because I'll be viewed as like a fundamentalist or like a complete Republican. Two things which I'm NOT, but there's this stereotype around anyone who's like, you can come to know Christ. Scripture is authoritative. Jesus is who he says he was. That's very difficult to dodge. So that's been a challenge in regard to community here. Because I don't feel that this is a place of belonging or a place of acceptance for me.

Interviewer: Tell me about Emotions.

Interviewee: In regard to academics, grades, and assignments—complete peace, I would say, 98, 99 percent of the time. I have learned over years, and time with the Lord, and some pretty hard circumstances, that if you truly do seek Jesus Christ first, if you truly do seek the Kingdom first, everything else is taken care of. So when we had that day, and your two biggest things on the wall were community and worry, I didn't write one for either of those.

Interviewer: So academics and grades just don't affect you?

Interviewee: No. Maybe. . . I spent time in the military before coming to seminary. I had bought a business. I had lost a business. So I've been through some pretty rough waters, compared to maybe some of the other students that come here.

So things like an essay (laughs)I'm not sweating about. "A" what's the big deal about it anyway? It's not going to follow me out of here. And there's no need to worry.

And it's really difficult to worry when you seek Christ first, because you learn that your priority is him, and he fights your battles. He is attentive to you. He knows the number of hairs on your head. It cracks me up seeing people around here stress and worry and be frustrated and fidget with grades and academics, and I'm honestly thinking, God really wants to take care of this. He really wants to carry these burdens and wants you to cast them and give them to him, and he can give you perfect peace in the meantime. But that's difficult to communicate to a lot of people. So I've just learned to do my thing.

In regard to community stuff, just feeling like a bit of an outsider—those emotions. Those are my two primary emotions for being here.

Interviewer: Thank you. Please tell me about your experience of Faculty and Staff.

Interviewee: Ranged. There are some I absolutely love, and there are some that I love to avoid. Professor Eaton, amazing professor. Frank Lopez, one of the few professors here that says he doesn't know things, and I love that. I think he even says it more than he should. Tell me you know SOMETHING [*vocal emphasis*], Frank! But we'll go through all of our material, and he's like, but you know, we really don't know. I think maybe with younger professors there's this huge pressure. I understand the idea of it that they have to know everything, and this is an academic place and they have to be intelligent, they have to have all of the answers. I really respect when at the end of the day professors have that piece of humility.

Interviewer: But not every professor here does.

Interviewee: No. Some are very much the opposite of that, you know this free-form piece that we can dialogue about that but we really don't know. This idea of control—there are some professors very bound, and I would even just call it a spirit or an idol of control. Where their voice must be heard. It must be done in this specific way. There is no room for change. Professor Schmidt made us hand write our final—handwritten, two and a half hours of writing! And I'm 30 years old. I'm very in shape. I do Yoga very consistently, I eat very well, and my hand after was ridiculously cramped. And I'm average age here. There are people in their 60s, 50s, 40s here who don't have that level of physical discipline. And why? What's the point? What's wrong with a laptop? What's this control issue? Why are you afraid of change? So, that's been very difficult. So I just avoid those people.

Interviewer: Tell me about Life Management.

Interviewee: Just hobbies and whatnot. Have a passion for ashtanga yoga, a very disciplined form of yoga. Do that four or five times a week. Love it. Go out swing dancing quite a bit. I used to teach when I was in college. There is a wonderful Lindy-hop swing dancing scene in town. Love to hang out with friends. Watch some football. Love one-on-one time with people at coffee shops.

Interviewer: Do you have much time to do that kind of thing that isn't ministry of presence time?

Interviewee: The good thing, a lot of that is blended within. A piece of being in youth ministry is be who you are. Do what you love, and take students and other leaders along with you. So a lot of my passions I just take with me. Students get to see that and there's a freedom to that. So there's enough time. But keep in mind. I'm at a huge advantage. I'm on the Montgomery GI Bill from my time in the military, so I haven't had to work during my seminary time. It's a huge advantage and just a huge blessing.

Interviewer: What was your MOS?

Interviewee: Look at you, knowing military lingo. I was a 91 Bravo. I was a medic.

Interviewer: Please tell me about Ministry experiences.

Interviewee: Curiously, nothing has changed too much with regard to my time here as before as regards ministry. Before that I was in the military. Again, what I do in Young Life is first, making sure that my time with the Lord is foremost. Loving and caring for the members on my team. I'm the oldest volunteer leader at Young Life and I have ten volunteer leaders under me. So it's good to pour my heart and my time and my attention into them, to make sure they're being cared for. Going to and building relationships with students is huge in Young Life. We're really intent on going to be where students are, as opposed to Christ came to us and walked this earth.

Interviewer: So where do you hang out?

Interviewee: I will go up to the school for lunch. I'll go to the football games. I'll hang out at a taco place, basketball games. If there are any parties, I'll often get invited. It's really just being in their lives. A big part of my ministry is speaking. I'm a gifted orator. And this past summer I was given the opportunity to be the speaker, presenting the Gospel to 50 high school students for our freshmen road trip weekend. I speak throughout the semester. This coming December 5–7, I get a chance to present the Gospel to about 250–300 high school students at our Young Life weekend camp, which is a huge blessing. So the presentation of the person of Christ and the presentation of the Gospel is something that is a huge part of my ministry, something I'm very passionate about, and something that I take very seriously and I love.

Interviewer: Tell me about Spirituality.

Interviewee: My world got flipped upside down in September, again, when I really sought for the first time, baptism of the Holy Spirit, which I had never really considered before. I was just introduced to it through my church.

Interviewer: Can you say in a sentence or two about what that is?

Interviewee: Sure. Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus talked about it. John the Baptist talked about it. John said that Jesus would come baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire. In Acts 2 at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit falls on a group of people and everyone starts speaking in strange tongues, and understanding each other and

prophesying, and that's when spiritual gifts are poured out; prophesy, words of knowledge, healing, signs and wonders, these sorts of things, all that comes with baptism of the Holy Spirit.

My experience with that happened in September, so then, before, my spirituality was just seeking intimacy with Christ, doing the work of an evangelist, going to students, proclaiming the Gospel, building relationships, doing Bible study. A lot of praise and worship for my quiet times. Really just seeking to be with the Lord and be in his presence. And all of that remains without question. Now, it's like all the fun stuff gets added to it. So now my worship times instead of being 15 minutes to a half hour will be an hour, hour and a half, to two hours, where I just want to be in the presence of God.

And speaking in tongues is the most wonderful form of worship. It's—I swear endorphins are released when I do this, because I just go away, and then am absolutely refreshed. Sitting in the presence of God, being in times of worship, praying for healing over people, speaking words of knowledge, these sorts of things are now all a part of the ball game. I walk around, the majority of the day, my hands are either tingling or warm with the Holy Spirit. It's like there's an energy on them. It's really fun. Hearing still small voices in my head.

I had a fun experience. I was sitting in my room one night. I was fasting for 24 hours, and the voice of God is just very clear on those days, and I get a word in my head, "Hey, Jay, Get up and go to the Starbuck's on 24th." I'm like, cool, God, what's going to go on? He's like, you're going to meet Justin the Satanist. And I met a Satanist named Justin, two times before at that same Starbuck's. I'm cool. I'm walking out my door, and he's Hey, take your bible. I'm like, cool, am I going to read him something? No, you're going to give it to him. So I go to the Starbuck's. He's not there. I just sit, wait, and read, chill for about 15 minutes. Fifteen minutes goes by, he walks in, uses the restroom. He has a seat next to me, we start talking. He says, Jay, I don't want to talk to you tonight. I don't want to talk about God. I told him about, Hey, God told me to come here. God told me to give you this bible. He's like, I don't want to talk to you, about God, and I don't want your bible. And then for the next two hours he talked. He talked to me, he talked about God, and he took my bible. And I didn't push any of it. I was just sitting there, listening.

My dreams have increased significantly. God is speaking to me in dreams. Seeking a lot of symbolism in that, seeking a lot of interpretation. Sometimes getting very clear and direct dreams. Sometimes writing them down, journaling them. That's now become part of my walk with Christ, too. Part of my spirituality. So, my relationship with Christ, my spirituality, my position with God the Father and the Holy Spirit is exceedingly rich. And that's something, if you don't mind me hopping back to the community, it's been difficult not to be able to share that. Or having those experiences looked at with skepticism, or just kind of an intellectual squint.

Interviewer: Thanks for sharing this with me. Another theme was Transformation, the way that seminary changes students. Tell me about transformation.

Interviewee: I would change that word to more of a solidifying for me. My two major times of transformation, coming to Christ at nineteen and baptism of the Holy Spirit at thirty, those are my two major times of spiritual getting flipped upside down.

Some people come here to seminary and they had a very defined faith before they came in, and they come here and get a bunch of stuff thrown at them and they come out with different ways of thinking. The opposite has happened for me. I come in and people are throwing all of these ideas at me, and I'm doing my best to discern, OK, OK I'll take that, I won't take that. That's not accurate; I'm not going to buy that. I do buy that; I'll take that and piece it together. So I'm walking out of here with a very similar paradigm to where I came in.

So, has the seminary "transformed" me? No, not really. I got new material, new information, but in regard to spiritual transformation, or even transformation in character, none of that has come through an academic program. I'm just reading and writing essays. Taking tests. Not much transformation comes with that. The majority of transformation in my life has come from strong encounters with God, or suffering.

Interviewer: Here you had more of the former, the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Interviewee: Yeah, but that didn't come from the seminary. That came from Hope Chapel and what's called The Kingdom Academy, our school of supernatural ministry there. In fact it was funny because I had gone to Professor Schmidt and Professor Carlson to say, Hey, will this course count as an elective, and they're like, no, and they blew me out of the water. They said, go ahead and take it, but it's a non-accredited program. So it lined up time-wise with my Senior year here.

Interviewer: And one last question. Does the seminary have an over-arching message that it promotes?

Interviewee: I don't think it has one. That's the problem. We're an academic institution. We're a block north of a big public university in a very democratic, liberal city, so here, the idea of one message, or one truth, or one claim that we're making, doesn't permeate this atmosphere at all. If you do that, you're viewed very skeptically, because you are making a Truth claim. So if I come here on the campus and say, Hey I've got four passages in the New Testament that clearly state that Jesus Christ is THE [*vocal emphasis*] only way to heaven, I've got arrows pointing around at me from everyone saying, No, wait. How can you say that? Or if I say scripture's completely authoritative, I'm going to get questions, and there'll be no agreement on stuff like that. So if there is [a message] maybe it's like, there is no Truth. That kind of mindset. I think that permeates here. But I don't know. If there's been one, I've missed it.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for sharing.

Databank

Transcript: The Highly Focused Participant

This interview was part of my dissertation research comparing the seminary experience of first- and second-career seminarians. This participant was a second-career United Methodist student. The interview took place in December 2008. I intended to ask thirteen open-ended questions, as I did of every student in the study. In this case, I asked ten questions in the time available to us. You will notice that I asked a few clarifying questions, in keeping with the "hands off; let them talk" approach that I took during the study. To protect the anonymity of the participant, I have edited names of places and the seminary that the student attended.

What did this participant want to get across to the interviewer? How might the interviewer have asked better follow-up questions? What does this interview teach you about good and bad interviewing practice?

Interviewer: To begin working through the themes discovered in the focus groups, please tell me about the seminary's Academic Program.

Interviewee: Remember one thing, I'm sitting in the unusual position that I have another seminary to compare it to, and that's a seminary in Texas. So when I go through here, I am comparing the two of them.

Frustrations first: When I was attending the other seminary, my GPA was 3.9. Granted it was an extension campus and having to travel back to and everything else. But when I came here, I can't do any better than a B+. So the question I have in my mind is why is there such a difference in the grading system, especially when you accept the grades from the other institution. I'm doing the same level of work in it, but here I can't get an A in anything.

Another point is recognition of a person's gifts. Here you have the requirement of the two languages, Hebrew and Greek. I'm Methodist. You look at a

Methodist seminary, those are electives. But here these are requirements, and not in my gifts. Every foreign language course I've ever taken has been a bust. My gift is not memorization but learning the principles and application. Granted, I worked my way through the three courses requiring Greek, barely passing. I took the Hebrew and made a D, but when you are doing pass/fail, you fail. I'm not taking the course again. Even if I have to find some other way to become a minister, I'm not taking the course again, especially under the same professor. When we were going through that course, even the student aides who had taken another professor, they could not understand why the professor was going through all the details he was. He recognized it's only a five week course, and there's only so much you can do in five weeks. Even after the course, it took me several months to catch up health-wise on it. It's almost as if there's no consideration at all that the hours required to get through that course are not only stressful but are detrimental to the student's health. It seemed like the professor tried to reach some goal he sees, but is very abusive of the student. And with the power they have over you, it is abuse.

A similar situation came up with another course, Christian Education. The professor would never recognize that the student is not taking just their course. Then the fall break was spent writing up a midterm exam, and then when you come up to the end of the semester and you have the same thing again, that he was calling the final, again, that's abuse.

Interviewer: Are those unusual. . . that amount of work for those two courses?

Interviewee: From everything I've seen, yes. It's an unusual quantity of stress and an unusual amount of work required for the amount of time. When I was taking Hebrew, I was lucky to get 2 to 3 hours of sleep a night, and that's not just five days a week, but seven. No one took the time to recognize, Hey, this isn't the student's gift. Maybe there's some other way to do it. Most of the Methodist seminaries I've heard of, again, these are elective courses. Does it interfere with your understanding of the OT and NT? I don't really think that it does. What they did do, instead of having just one semester on OT and one on NT, with the language course, you spend a longer amount of time on it. It gave you tools of how to do the exegesis if you don't have the foreign language. I think that's more important for the everyday minister today. I think the translation of language is important, but should be the theologians, not the everyday minister.

Another thing that's been disturbing to me is I'm not a teacher, but I was an instructor in the navy for 2 years. . . that five week course on how to be an instructor gave them a better idea of how to prepare a lesson plan, or lesson objectives than what I've seen around here, or the other seminary I went to. Why is it that experts within a field of study with PhDs, etc., why in all that preparation don't you give them courses in how to teach?
I appreciate the opportunity I've had to attend here. The other seminary started a program in San Antonio, it was my denomination. I was able to become a minister through that route. Really at my age becoming a minister by going through seminary is unusual. I could have done it through what they call, local pastor. Doing the continuing education there. At the other seminary, there

were a lot people doing that. But they closed it down. There were issues of institutional integrity. When you tell everyone we're going to have a four year program but by the end of the third year you say, OK, we're shutting it off. So that's one reason I didn't pursue it with that institution. The other reason is that I would have had to go up where they are located. My family said, one year Dad, yes, two years, no. That's why I'm at this seminary.

When you look at the classes we have, what is the ratio of young people coming out of college, and then the second careers. I applied for grants and scholarships, but there was never any recognition of, yeah they've got money saved up, but that's got to see them through retirement. They are going into a profession that pays substantially less and yet we don't want to give them financial assistance. We want to get them in debt and give them student loans. When you are 50 and 60, do you really want to take on that kind of debt, so you have to work at the same time. But then you still can't get any money because you made too much money last year. We have no program to help you. There needs to be some ways that the denomination sees this person as valuable, so why don't we give them some help.

Interviewer: Tell me about being in seminary and your Call to Ministry.

Interviewee: I have been a contractor, engineer since I was 16. I've been on the construction side, owner/manager side, and the engineering side. So that's why the city hired me because of my background. I was head of engineering at Brackenridge Hospital. I got there and they discovered they were missing 25 million dollars. After being the head there for a year, my job was essentially laying people off, then I was laid off. During that time, my father passed away, and the two things together hit me hard. I had an uncle that said, what you have to do is go on an Emmaus walk. When I went on that walk a year after Dad passed away, just after I was laid off, I was under a lot of emotional stress. When I was on that walk, there was communion on Saturday, what they call [dying moments?]. I asked not to get rid of the memories but to get rid of the hurt. And within my head I heard a voice that said, Stand up and talk for me. The next two or three years my sponsor and I started and set up a lay speaker program. The pastors actually used the speakers. After a year or two I kept hearing the voice as if this wasn't enough. I did more research reading Luther and others, but thought no, my gift is engineering. That's where I'm meant to be. But then, maybe it was Calvin. . . when it is for the good of the church, maybe you are called to change our professions. I was reading Barkley one time and he said, you know Jesus started his ministry at 30. But that's not the 30 of today. That's like 60 today. Jesus had a career before. So I decided, OK, I decided to do the ministry route.

That's when the Methodists were deciding to do the lay guide process. There are nine sessions, I went through 8 and said, no. I'm meant to be a good lay person. But no, I just kept getting dogged. I said OK. The people at the local church know me. There will be enough No votes, and I'll have done what I'm supposed to. Went to the PPR, and a lot of people I've had battles with, and it was a unanimous vote. So then I had to go to a church conference and it was unanimous again. Now I have to go before the district board and thought

they'll say No, but it was unanimous again. Then I said OK, let's do this thing. Wesley always said there are two calls, one of the church and one of the heart. Another thing that happened, it was less than a year after I was laid off, I was laid off from another company, but this time I wasn't stress[ed] and thought, there will be a way. I found another job with an engineering firm with a strong Christian—in fact, his father was a Methodist minister. A sane person would say that you can't work and do all of the classes and everything else that you need to do, but I've managed to make satisfactory progress through it all. And I can't say that it's me.

Interviewer: Tell me about the seminary and your church's requirements for ministerial training.

Interviewee: The biblical languages are not an expectation. We have already determined that if need be, instead of receiving an MDiv degree, I'll receive an MDiv diploma. That has already been approved by the district superintendent and the powers that be in Nashville. That proves to me that what they are looking for is equivalency of their requirements. Our denomination puts more emphasis on church history, theology that recognizes the benefits of Wesley. Here everything is Calvin and Barth. Sometimes if you bring it up he's included in, but other times it's like, OK, we have to put up with him because you're here. We know that there were conflicts between Presbyterians and Wesley. . . [recording unclear] More OT and NT biblical studies. . . [recording unclear]

Interviewer: Are you having to do more to meet these requirements?

Interviewee: I'm not having to do additional stuff because if you meet the requirements of a recognized institution, then that's fine. But if you don't meet those requirements, then we'll accept equivalencies. The main difference is the focus on biblical studies rather than the biblical languages.

I transferred in with more OT and NT and history. So I've doubled up. Another thing is that students need to get into the candidacy process. Many of the students here aren't into the process until they are about ready to graduation. There are ways that can be handled differently. The Methodists have to be approved by local parish, district board, then the conference board. And there's also lay guide process. And even before it's approved by the local parish, it's got to be approved by the local pastor parish relationships committee. There's a lot of things where they're checking the person all along. So to get to half way through seminary and then be told by the process, no I don't think so, what's a student supposed to do?

Interviewer: Where were you in the process when you came here?

Interviewee: I had already gone through. . . I'm a licensed local pastor. Then when I was assigned to a church I have to do what is called continuing ed. So I am a certified candidate for elder also. So I went through their process before I ever started seminary.

Interviewer: Tell me about going to seminary and Community.

Interviewee: It’s difficult. I live off campus. I have to work to support this, and my family. Last semester we had group projects. It’s very difficult to find times when we could even get together. Yes I have friends here and I value those relationships, but I don’t see community the way y’all see it. If a student has responsibilities off campus, how can you form community here? Then you have to either redefine community as something larger than just here, or you have to find something that will work with those students. I look around here, and I’m not the only one. There are some here who live on campus, minimally working, but some have taken night watchmen jobs to get through it. My community is in Muldoon, the engineering firm I work for, and my family.

Interviewer: Thanks. Tell me about the Emotions associated with going to seminary.

Interviewee: Outside of frustration...? I sense a lot of stress and frustration amongst the students due to the workload again. But at the same time, you’ve got a lot of good students here who have a heart to help someone else, so they are willing to put up with almost anything to get through here. The perseverance, the heart of love, the searching for knowledge is important here. I think it’s due to these students being called to some sort of ministry and it’s burning within them. But there is a frustration due to the amount of work, amount of reading to do.

At the other seminary I had to read a book about how to read a book. It’s not about quantity but quality. We go through there in CE, we went through so many books and the last one was a summary of the other books. Why didn’t we just do that one, especially since it was by the professor? It gets back again to priorities. Frustration is the primary emotion. At what point are we going to be allowed to feel that we are trying to do a ministry rather than just trying to get through a course?

Interviewer: Tell me about the Faculty and Staff.

Interviewee: You’ve got some professors here who have a heart for what they are doing. I mean not just being an expert in their subject, but actually trying to train people to be the next expert. I feel that part of the problem that some of them have is they need the skills of being an instructor beyond the skills of being a biblical interpreter. Do it like they did in the navy. And when you ask them what are the course objectives for today. And they’ll be able to define what it is they want to do instead of getting sidetracked and focus on the information the student absolutely needs to have. We get on too many rabbit trails.

Some of the professors want to create a type of environment that’s at another highly prestigious university. I understand wanting to strive for quality, but if I’d wanted to be a biblical interpreter, I would have gone to Princeton. I came to this seminary. I want to be a minister. I think even if that person sat down and said what does this person really need to know lesson by lesson. . . that part of being an instructor is missing. Another way to put this is what are the priorities? We get a lot of other stuff and that’s fine, but we need to be able to identify the essentials. Some of them just seem to be selfish with the students’ time. We don’t treat their time as a resource. We don’t recognize the time

limits. When you take up all of that time, you aren't helping the student if you expect them to do well in 4 or 5 courses at a time.

Interviewer: Tell me about going to seminary and life management, the parts of your life besides going to school.

Interviewee: I work as an engineer. My son is 30, daughter 28. I've also got a grandson. I've been working half time this semester when I'm taking classes, but when the seminary is on break, I work 40 hours at the engineering firm, maybe more. We are supposed to do 4 hours outside of class for every class hour and I try to do that, but it's a balancing game. I'm also a one quarter-time pastor.

Interviewer: Tell me about seminary and experiences in Ministry.

Interviewee: I'm the pastor for a Methodist church out in the country. . . We have an average attendance of ten point five. We've had 18 members, but 2 or 3 have not been attending so now we have 14. I was told this is not a full blown church but a preaching station. We've tried to move them from the '68 hymnal and move them to United Methodist. So now we are trying to grow this thing. But how do we do that when the people moving in are mostly retired folks from Houston? I always thought it doesn't matter what the size of the church is, you always try to give the best program. As a lay preacher we went to nursing homes. One Sunday only two people showed up, and one of them didn't really know what was going on, but one needed to hear the word of God. So no, my ministry is not large in numbers, but numbers are not what it's about.

Interviewer: Tell me about going to seminary and Spirituality.

Interviewee: I have not really felt God's presence around here. I do not live on campus. My home is east of here out in the country. To get home, I have to go through the woods on a dirt road to get there. When I'm sitting in my easy chair, what I'm watching are all of the birds flying in over our deck. When I look out my window I see woods and nature. When I sit down and read and meditate, my environment there is like it is in the midst of God's creation. I don't feel it here.

I don't get very much out of chapel. When I did go, it was times when important things were going on here on campus and out in the world, but they weren't addressed. It's almost as if the outside world has no relationship to what we are doing here. But if that's true, then what are we doing here? If we are not going to recognize the situation in the world in our services, then what are we doing here?

Here, the classes are all about getting through here. My class at the other seminary on spiritual formation has helped me get through here. There is an author, Phyllis Tickle who has written on the divine offices, and prepared psalm and scripture readings for a whole year, and it goes back on Benedictine tradition. But when I'm going to school and having to write papers, I don't have time to do the daily devotions. The first day that I was finished with school work, I started back into it.

Interviewer: Tell me about the seminary and Transformation, how you are being changed.

Interviewee: I've seen some change in other students, especially younger ones. But at the same time, especially the older ones, the habits become the virtues of a minister. When you are already 30 or 40, those characteristics are already ingrained. I think for them the character is already in them when they got here. I think that is true for me. I haven't changed that much, but I've gained the tools.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing with me. I have a final question, and we're done. Does the seminary have an over-arching message that it promotes?

Interviewee: This place reminds me of George Whitfield and John Wesley. This institution is Presbyterian and it believes in a higher level of academics for the student—We are trying to train these people academically to serve the needs of the church. What they need is a little more Wesley. It's not just all academics. What we need are ministers of the heart as well as the head. When I've said that in class, I've gotten all of the Presbyterians upset including the teachers. The goal here is that they are trying to produce an academically higher student where they need more of a heart.

We are so focused on trying to do the academics, we don't have time to get in touch with our spiritual aspects, with God. Within this community I've met other people and discussions with them affects how I approach ministry.

Databank

Transcript: Faculty Member of a Presbyterian Seminary

I conducted this interview with a member of the faculty of a Presbyterian seminary for the study eventually published as Lincoln (2020). The text was transcribed professionally by Verbalink. I have made some modest edits to preserve the anonymity of persons and places mentioned in the interview. In the first stage of data collection for this study, a focus group identified eleven key themes. Each theme named something that faculty members thought was important in the lifeworld of ministers serving congregations. My main questions were all posed in the general form of "Tell me about X." I have used bold to indicate each theme.

Interviewer: We are conducting another interview with a seminary faculty in the mapping the pastoral mind study. And you have before you the eleven themes that the focus group discovered. And I think today I'd like to start off with the theme that's on your hymnal sheet there, number three, **teaching**. And this is defined for our purposes here as the ways that pastors instruct people about the Bible, theology, and Christian living. So tell me about teaching.

Interviewee: Well, I think the primary way that pastors instruct people about the Bible today as opposed to maybe 50 years ago is through the preaching ministry. Fewer and fewer people are coming to Bible studies and other kinds of studies. And studies would be a secondary way, especially in churches that have active Bible study groups. But still the preach toward is the primary way in which pastors both preach and teach, I think, at least in my experience.

Interviewer: Would you say that's true both in black churches and white churches?

Interviewee: No. It is not the truth in both black churches and white churches. And it may not be the truth in more evangelical churches either. I think mainly in churches people have generally got away from Bible study. but in evangelical churches and predominantly black churches, there are traditions of going to church more than once a week. And in those traditions, particularly in the black

church, the pastor will do some teaching on Wednesday night. However, teaching on Wednesday night may still look a whole lot like preaching. [*Laughs*]

Interviewer: An expository sermon.

Interviewee: An expository sermon or more of a point by point through the Bible piece rather than a declamatory theme that might happen on Sunday morning. May taking on a book point by point. So you would find more of that. And I have actually seen in historically black churches people show up in large numbers for teaching in a way that I have not seen in historically white churches.

The other group of people in our Presbyterian circles, you might see it's Presbyterian women because they have a tradition of a Bible study every year. And so that Bible study kinda fuels it. And many pastors end up asked to be the people for that Bible study.

Interviewer: Thank you. If something occurs to you later on, you can say it, and I will move it under its right heading, so fear not. So thank you. Well, let's hop back up to the theme that's number one on this sheet. Preaching since you alluded to it. **Preaching** is the way the pastors plan and deliver sermons. Tell me about pastors serving congregations and preaching?

Interviewee: That's the primary job in the minds of the congregation. Not necessarily the primary job the pastors think they're doing. But for a congregation, the pastor can't preach, oftentimes that's whether or not they're gonna stay moment. And preaching, depending on denomination, can be more or less performative. It is always someway performative. But there are particular groups, denominations for whom preaching means one thing as opposed to another thing.

Within mainline Presbyterian churches, preaching may be a 20-minute exercise that starts with some kind of personal narrative, walks through the text, and brings us into some current day conclusion. But then the historically black church, preaching may be one with prophetic zeal and may—and it will certainly will end with some form of what is called in the black church tradition of preaching celebration in which you have the in-breaking of the African retentions of call and response.

So you have the preacher saying things and the congregation either responding in words or responding in shouts until the congregation and the preacher are both at quite at a fever pitch. And oftentimes music is involved in that. So it's a very different kind of preaching from the Protestant church downtown. And the two of them would not necessarily interact well with one another. Protestant church in downtown also could probably get with the guy who's shouting. But his church couldn't get with the 20-minute lecture. [*Laughs*]

And then what I've seen in some evangelical churches is that the preacher moment then becomes an expository moment where you might be taking a text point by point by point and walking through the text with a goal in mind, with a very clear goal in mind. Within different traditions, preaching may be something that has to be—that is expected to be read and it's expected to be something literary. In which case, the pastors are writing every week and may

even have the text of the message up on the Website or downloadable off the Website.

In other traditions, what's more important is not what the pastor has written word for word but whether or not you could hear it proclaimed. And so audio on the sermon is more important. Video of the sermon is more important. Whether or not the pastor preaches with actual text immaterial. What's critical is whether or not the pastor can declaim in a particular way.

Interviewer: So that might be somewhat more highly performative in terms of embodiment or vocal presence and things then.

Interviewee: And so for pastors coming into those churches, their preparation is different for Sunday morning than pastors who are writing sermons. The preparation for the declamatory sermon or evangelical circles for the sermon that may not be as declamatory, not as performative, but oftentimes is still off the cuff of that notes is much more of a figuring out what you're going to say early in the week.

And saying it over and over again until you embody it so that you can then be able to speak it and talk to the congregation. And so again, pastoral preparation means different things for different people. They still may be doing exegesis, but they may be doing exegesis two or three weeks out for them to be able to do—to get to the point where they can get a sermon that they can then speak. But it's a different kind of process.

Interviewer: Thank you. Related to preaching is the theme that we're calling of liturgy, that's so that I don't say worship is worship, how pastors plan and participate in the congregation's worship of God, whether that's Sunday morning or Wednesday night or a burial service or a revival meeting. Tell me about pastors and liturgy.

Interviewee: That's is as varied as preaching. [*Laughs*] That's probably even more varied than preaching. So there is the stream of pastors and the stream out of which I have very definitely come which is those are really based around their own mass. So there are those of us who have a standard call to worship, maybe an opening prayer, opening hymn, the confessional sequence followed by a glory of some kind, followed by the passing of the peace. And then there's a period of time where we listen for the word. And there's a very standard set. And we may deviate from that a little bit, but that standard set liturgy is what we're used to.

Depending on the church, the pastor may pick all the hymns or may not. Depending on the church, the pastor may or may not be responsible for writing the prayer, either the confessional sequence prayer or the prayer at the table or whatever happens. Some churches will rely exclusively on the written liturgies. But some churches will expect pastors to write their prayers. Like Central Presbyterian church where I worshipped for years, the pastors all wrote their prayers. They very rarely used prayers out of the book.

Interviewer: Would others besides the pastor ever be tasked with writing prayers or. . .

Interviewee: Generally, the people that are tasked with writing prayers in some churches like that are the people who are doing the pastoral ministry or going to be doing the praying themselves. Now what I was getting to is the idea of written prayers, again, is one genre of Christianity, right?

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Interviewee: There are other liturgies of Christianity that don't follow the maps. Some liturgies of Christianity include a large portion of celebration. And then extemporaneous praying in one kind of church isn't extemporaneous praying in another kind. And those things are just expected to come out of the pastor. The pastor may have prepared them ahead of time or may not have but is expected to be able to do that kind of extemporaneous praying seemingly effortlessly whether or not she or he has prepared. [*Laughs*]

Interviewer: One develops a skill at improvisations.

Interviewee: Exactly. It is a kind of improvisation work. And it is also a kind of ability to craft in words the prayers of the people on the spot. So to listen and respond to the congregation in ways that—I mean, I don't think can be taught at seminary. That's a lived experience. And so you just have to learn how to do by being in the space and doing it.

Interviewer: And that's a bit different from including a petition because there was a horrible event that happened on Friday afternoon and you want to note that in the—

[*Crosstalk*]

Interviewee: No, this is different from that. This is just being able to get up and pray at any given time during the period of the service. Then in other traditions, yet again, there may be folks who are called liturgists or whose job it is to do—who have been asked to do prayers for the people in various ways. Those folks that would be asked to craft what they're going to say. And sometimes they'll write it. Oftentimes, they won't.

At a black seminary that I taught at, for instance, when we had worship, a student might be asked to be liturgists or that might be asked to do an opening prayer. And that student would just start in extra—again improvisationally, extemporaneously and start to pray and just try to say something consistent and cogent not knowing what the preacher might actually be saying.

The same thing is true with music. In the churches that I was just talking about initially, music is part of the whole process of delivering the word. The word is not just what is preached. The word is a whole liturgy whereas in the other denominational settings I was talking about, music is chosen by the music leaders. And the music chosen by the music leader maybe in consultation with the pastor and maybe not. [*Laughs*]

Interviewer: And in context where there isn't consultation expected that's okay because. . .

Interviewee: Because that's the way we've always done it. And also because usually the music ministry, especially in the black church, is an oral tradition. And people who have been singing in black church choirs often have been singing in black church choirs since they were young enough to hold a tune. So they have a set of body of knowledge that is quite large and quite extensive and can turn on a dime.

So they may have rehearsed to do X, but something in the service might cause the music director to turn to them, stand them up and say we're singing this, knowing full well that they'll be able to do it in key in four-part harmony because they know it that well. So it's a different relationship of music to the worship space. Again, and it's a very culturally different thing.

Interviewer: And in those kinds of contexts, the minister knows that and is freed up from worrying about that?

Interviewee: Exactly. Exactly. But then the minister of music is paid quite handsomely [*laughs*] because those folks—

Interviewer: Right, 'cause it's her job to do that.

Interviewee: —who can do that are as important as a pastor. [*Laughs*]

Interviewer: And are honored as minister—

[*Crosstalk*]

Interviewee: Yes, minister of music and are quite clearly minister of music.

Interviewer: Thank you. Another theme the focus group discovered was the one that we've named **equipping**, the way that pastors discern and cultivate the gifts and talents of members of a congregation. Tell me about pastors and equipping.

Interviewee: So the work of equipping goes to the other part of pastoral work which is to know and to do ministry with members of the church. Even though the church thinks the pastor's most important job is to preach, I argue that the pastor's most important job is to know every member in that church and to know what's going on with every member in that church to the extent that that's possible. Now, if it's a church of 600 people that may have to be delegated and this may have to be a pastoral team rather than a single pastor because you can't do equipping until you know who you've got.

It's once you understand who you have, then you can pull people aside to say you have gift of this, can we ask you to do this? You have a gift of this, can we ask you to do this? Or you can see latent gifts that could be cultivated. Like, you can hear a young person who can sing and connect them to the choir here or to the organist. Or you can see a young person who's very studious and very good in math, maybe connect them to the church accountant. Or you see a couple come in with—who are very good with kids and connect them to the children's ministry or to the youth ministry.

Interviewer: Now you've expressed that in your opinion this is job one.

Interviewee: I think it's job one.

Interviewer: When you look out based on your knowledge of pastors going about in the world, do you think they take it as seriously as that, or are they using other strategies to try to discover gifts and talents?

Interviewee: I don't know. I don't know the answer to that. I do think some pastors take it very seriously and try to discern. Sometimes the difficulty with pastors is they have decided—and not just pastors but other members of staff is they decide that there's just one gift they want out of this one person, and that's not the gift the person wants to share with the church. [*Laughs*] And the person may have other gifts that they are willing to share.

Interviewer: Why might I decide that?

Interviewee: Oh, for instance, I'm a professor and I go to your church, therefore you want me to teach. Right?

Interviewer: Well, that's easy. [*Laughs*]

Interviewee: But that may not be where I want to serve. And that's why I say knowing your members is more important because I may have a two-year-old who sits with me, and I don't wanna have to mess up our morning schedule to try to get here early to put the two-year-old in childcare who does not want to go to childcare to teach. I may much rather go help the deacons to visitations and bring communions 'cause I'm an ordained teaching elder and can do that. And I can take my two-year-old if I had them along, you see.

So that's what I mean about knowing your members. It's critical not just to know what they do but who they are and where they are in their lives and what sorts of things are burning for them right now in their lives rather than some people pegging them by occupation.

Interviewer: Or sort of looking at your resume.

Interviewee: Or more stage of life. That person's in their 20s, therefore they'll be good at youth ministry when in fact that person in their 20s might be much better at accounting. [*Laughs*]

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And the person in their 50s might be fantastic at youth ministry. [*Laughs*]

Interviewer: Yeah. I was lousy at youth ministry in my 20s.

Interviewee: Exactly.

Interviewer: Just as I am now.

Interviewee: I mean, 'cause you're too close.

Interviewer: Well, never mind. Yeah.

Interviewee: So I think that's the piece that's hard is—and in all churches this is the case. It gets harder particularly when you're dealing with young people, but even with

adults because we're so overscheduled. And particularly for churches with upwardly mobile and upper class and upper middle class folk. Everything is geared toward college, and everything is geared toward getting the kids into the best possible school and so on and so forth. And so there's no sense of this is part of what we do. This is part of who we are.

And so that's the piece that's hard to cultivate is church—and especially in the majority white churches. Now in the black church it's a little different because sometimes the black church is the only game in town. Like for instance, I went to preach in a black church once that had its own cheerleading squad and its own basketball team. And so [*laughs*] because it needed to be the only game in town. There was no other safe place for the kids to go.

And a lot of evangelical churches do similar things. They create Friday night thing so the teenagers aren't out at the bars. They're at church. That creates a different kind of equipping because you've got the kids right there. You got a better sense of who they are or what they're possibly good at. And I think the best church is, the best pastors know how to connect people to people. It's not so much that they, themselves, are doing the equipping as they are helping to create the community then in spite of weaving the web to tie people of the community together in important ways.

So they're connecting that young woman who's into accounting with a dude who used to work for IBM. And they're connecting that young man who's into cooking with a woman in a kitchen. So they have these interesting connections. And that young boy who really loves playing the organ is being connected to the organist. And I mean, I've seen that happen and seen that happen a lot. In fact, at Central in Atlanta, one of our youth went off to St. Olaf in organ because of his connection to the organist and his ability to play organ.

Interviewer: Wow. Thank you. You talked about how knowing [*unclear*] pastors should know her people which kind of, to me, makes a logical segue to the theme of caring, the ways that pastors counsel members and are present with them in life circumstances. Say some more about pastors and **caring**.

Interviewee: Knowing folks means also being able to think pastorally and also critically and respond pastorally when needed. And that could mean any number of things. It could mean the obvious things like weddings and divorces and funerals, baptisms. But there are other things that come up across a pastor's desk that you're not prepared for and you've gotta think about how do I help folks with this.
One situation, somebody made a racist remark to me. And I was in tears. I was so offended. And having that conversation, being able to have that conversation with a pastor, being able to go to the pastor and say this is what has happened. Go to the pastor, be able to set up a reconciliation in such a way that the person who made the remark was able to say look, I didn't realize that you heard it that way, and that was certainly not what I meant, certainly what I meant to say at all. But being able to make those connections. And I think also being to hold people together that disagree with each other. Very difficult task, particularly in this day and age where the Internet has—what's the word I'm

looking for—magnified the differences between us and has encouraged our fragmentation.

Interviewer: So what's the marvelous charism that allows pastors to hold people together who disagree?

Interviewee: I think the charism is helping folks understand that they are family and that family do disagree with each other and you don't stop being family if you do. [*Laughs*] And that takes a kind of skill because this is what I said, knowing your folks is job one. Knowing your folks is job one. Loving those folks is job two. [*Laughs*] You can't love who you don't know that's why they're in that order.

But you can't—loving your folks is job two. And being honest about loving all your folks, including the ones you disagree with and finding ways to be intentional about that and hold together these folks who love. That's the hard work. And that means being present when folk may not have thought they wanted you present.

One of the most powerful persons I had from a black Presbyterian once was about going to serve in his first majority white church. And there was an older couple who did not want anything to do with him until he ended up ministering at their funeral—at one of their funerals. And that changed who he was to them. But he did not write them off. He could not write them off 'cause he's the pastor. His job is to help knit this body together.

The Bible talks about shepherding the sheep. There will be those who wander this way and wander that way and wander the other way. And there will be rams who butt heads. And your job is told to shepherd the sheep. [*Laughs*] And that can be some of the most draining stuff you do because you can you're gonna have to have—you often h-, you may have difficult conversations. You may have to have difficult conversations about sexual prediction. You may have to have difficult conversations about the messy violence. You may have difficult conversations about rape and incest. You may have to have difficult conversations about adoption and abortion that regardless of where you are theologically on the spectrum, you still need to deal with. You may have to have difficult conversations about sexuality and sexual orientation. Unless you are prepared to love these folk, you're gonna fail. You're gonna tear folk apart.

Interviewer: Thank you. Another theme that you all in the group identified is different from caring and different from equipping is **leading**. The way pastors discover a vision for God's work in their communities and motivate members to strive towards—so talk about pastors and leading.

Interviewee: Oh man. See, pastors are asked to do so much.

[*Laughter*]

Interviewer: Yes, ma'am.

Interviewee: And the gift of some of these more denominational bodies as a pastor, especially the job of leading is not done alone. In the Presbyterian church, the job of leading is the job of the session and the pastor together. In the Methodist

church, it is the job of the pastor parish committee and the pastor together. It's never just the pastor making these decisions. But. . .

Interviewer: So what's the pastor's—so it's not—

Interviewee: So the pastor's job. . .

Interviewer: —so it's not sort of an autocracy then?

Interviewee: It's not an autocracy. It is the pastor's job first, going back to equipping and caring, to help folks call to those positions, folks who have vision. And then to listen collectively with them for where the spirit seems to be leading the church. But I think it's also—I mean, this is where the pastor needs to be grounded in scripture and prayer because if the pastor is grounded in scripture and prayer and paying attention around the world, there's plenty of things the church needs to be doing. [*Laughs*]

And knowing where their particular congregation is and what their gifts and graces are and what their weaknesses are should, again getting back to knowing being job one, help pastors to discern with council ideally. And I do really mean—even for churches in which it's a solo pastor, council is critical here even if you just pull aside senior members of the church and say this is what I'm thinking, what do you think?

But with council to discern where next to go, how next to live into faithful discipleship. What's the next thing we need to be doing to be faithful? And what are those places that we don't want to see that we really do need to see? Like, the neighborhood has changed and we haven't. [*Laughs*] Like, we're older than we used to be, and we're not attracting younger people. Like, we've so put a premium in young people that we stopped calling our seniors to ministry. Like, we really need to tend to this building, and this building really is falling down around us. And if it were gonna be of any place in the community, we either need to decide what we're gonna do with this building one way or another. And that may also mean leading the church to close and say this part of our ministry's done, we need to reconvene someplace else. And those are difficult places to go. And that's why I don't think a pastor should do that by themselves which gets back to number one, knowing your members and loving your members because unless you have good council around you, you will break your church apart trying to do this by yourself.

Interviewer: Thank you. Kind of related to leading, in some ways, is the distinctive theme of **outreach**. Whereas leading we're kind of defining for the congregants, with outreach, it's the way the pastors express the gospel to non-members and care for the local community and beyond. So tell me about pastors in congregations and outreach.

Interviewee: So the pastor is a public person in the community. The pastor's not a private citizen. The pastor's a public citizen. And that's another piece of the work. I think this is why Professor Homestead very helpful on this campus 'cause what really gets the pastors is not private citizen. The pastor's a public citizen. As a public citizen, you are the pastor of the church sometimes in town and some-

times one of the churches in town.

You lead a large number of the citizenship of the churches in town. And you speak with a voice that is more or less heard as a moral voice depending on gender, age, sexual orientation and the nature of the town in which you are located. [*Laughs*] But more or less raise a moral voice. When you walk out of the door, if you are colored, people knew who you were and asked things of you that they do not ask of you when you're walking out of the house as whites.

So you are a public citizen. And that means that we have, as pastoral folks, a responsibility to the community in which we live, to be public citizens. And to encourage our members to be public citizens also, to encourage our members not to lapse into this notion of being a private citizen but to pray for and advocate for the well-being of the place in which we're living and the people through whom we do ministry. And that looks differently in different communities, right.

For one church, it might be hosting the CROP walk. It might be advocating at the legislature for more money for schools or for public transportation or whatever the big issue is. It might mean, as North Avenue Presbyterian church has done, gathering the faith community around the issue of trafficking and getting, because of its location and its power, some of the players that they'll need to pay attention and start changing some of the laws around how people that are trafficked are treated.

It also might mean leading Black Lives Matter. It might mean putting on a collar and walking in Ferguson and being seen as a trouble-maker and being arrested. It might mean letters to the editor. It might mean showing up at town council meetings and putting that on your schedule and telling somebody I'm sorry, but I'm at town council meeting this night. And unless somebody has died, don't call me. [*Laughs*] Go on. I'm doing this part of my work as pastor. And understanding that that's your job.

Now, you can't do it all, especially if you are a solo pastor 'cause you get to choose to what extent that looks. Now that's the outreach as justice piece. There's also the outreach as just reaching out to the community inviting them in. And that can look like ashes at the subway platform on Ash Wednesday available for free to anybody who wants to come and just get ashes because they can't get to church today.

Since they can't go to church, church will come to you. It might mean just setting up shop as some friends do in a coffee shop once a week and just putting their computer down. They're working getting work done. But if somebody comes over to talk, then they begin to be known as a pastor. People come over and talk and they do counseling [*unclear*].

Interviewer: Few will wear the uniform so that people know?

Interviewee: Sometimes. Sometimes not. Depends on who it is. Higher church people are more likely to wear the uniform all the time. And some lower church folk aren't

likely to wear it at all. But they talk to folks and folks begin to know who they be. [*Laughs*] I think it also means things like paying attention to what's going on in the community and finding ways that our church can be of service. So local food pantry is in need of X, so you go to the congregation. And as a response to the word proclaimed and to the challenge of the gospel, can we not help provide this local food pantry with what they need, at least with some of it.

Interviewer: I suspect there's some kind of variation, but lots of pastors looking at outreach given that people think preaching is the most important job. And you know it's knowing your people and loving them is the most important job. Where does time allocation and passion for outreach fit in with in sort of the whole web of thing?

Interviewee: Well, as I said, I still think that knowing your people is the number one job. I really do. But knowing your people involves knowing the community in which they're located too. So the two of them are connected in that respect. And part of outreach is helping your folk understand that outreach is everybody's job, not just the pastor's job. So part of outreach is helping folks to—and that's where you bring your friend to church Sundays or which would be a more black church tradition.

Or homecoming Sunday or we're having a special event on Sunday. It's a good time for you to invite somebody. But it's also just anytime and anyplace you have a neighbor invite them. And that often starts with the church leadership and the church youth being told really do invite folks. And then that grows in that way.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Interviewee: But once they're there, it gets back to job one which is knowing your folks. [*Laughs*]

Interviewer: So if I—second time I visited you, you remember—

Interviewee: Still don't know who I be.

Interviewer: —my name.

Interviewee: Or at least my face.

Interviewer: Yes, good to see you. Great. Thank you. Like it or not, almost every focus group I've done has identified a theme they've called **administration**. The way that pastors organize and manage a congregation's activities and resources, human, fiscal, and [*unclear*]. Tell me about pastors and congregations in administration.

Interviewee: Well, the pastor ultimately is in charge of the calendar. Now the truth is that the session of the church, if it's a Presbyterian church or some other group, the church may govern the calendar. But the pastor usually sets most of the things on there. There's the [*unclear*] of Sunday that's always on the calendar.

But there are things like when is stewardship? How long of a period is steward-

ship? When do we have to have a budget done? What are the major meetings I have to go to outside of the stuff I have to be at church for like presbytery or districts or senates or what are the trainings I need to do? What are the things that we do as a congregation every year that we can't forget to do? Who is in charge of making the bulletins? Who is in charge of putting the money in the bank? Who is in charge of calling someone if something breaks or fixing it ourselves?

The pastors have staff. So part of being head of staff is managing his staff. That part of being head of staff is hiring the right people so you don't have to manage them that closely. [*Laughs*] And that requires a level of discernment, right? You gotta know that the person you hired to fix the place knows how to fix the place and isn't just there because he's deacon Wilda's great-grandson [*laughs*] and needed a summer gig. And similarly, especially with money that the people who are dealing with the finances of the church know what they are doing. So that is that part of it.

If you have a good team that can still be job three. If you do not have a good team, you cannot do ministry because you're too busy being an administrator. And unless that's the—if you're in a multi-church—multi-pastor pulpit and that's your particular call to be the church administrator that is different. But if you are the solo pastor of your church, your job is to get a good team together so you don't have to do it all. And so that's delegate responsibility.

So you still have to put together the weekly—the annual retreat, make sure everyone's calendar's in the right place. But then you need a good person in charge of X,Y, and Z who are gonna carry it out. And you don't have to do it. And so it's having a staff and trusting your staff. Or having volunteers and trusting your volunteers, whatever it takes.

Interviewer: Thank you. I don't award gold stars, but I think you're the first person to talk about the calendar in administration.

Interviewee: I was in a pastoral—well, not in the pastoral stuff. I was director of Christian education at the church for six and a half years. Every year we had a retreat. Every year we did calendar. Every month we gathered together as a staff. First thing we did was calendar.

Interviewer: Right. Very important. Thank you. Let's see, we have three more themes. **Study** was a theme, how pastors give careful thought to the Bible culture, theology, and experiences in ministries. You may remember we had cards that were sort of like I learned so much from my people kind of thing. but tell me about pastors and study.

Interviewee: I do think that two things. Number one, I think pastors need to negotiate and keep study time from their congregations. And congregations need to respect that.

Interviewer: Is this away study time, like a week—

Interviewee: Away, a block of—

Interviewer: —two weeks?

Interviewee: —a block of time that they can dedicate to the work of study, to helping to read through major pieces of reading, to do the work of studying scripture in particular. I also think pastors benefit from colleagues and from going through books together and reading things together with one another whether that's done in person, whether that's done virtually on the Web. And for many solo pastors it has to be done virtually on the Web 'cause there isn't a colleague around who's gonna work with them.

If you're a single solo pastor who happens to be female in a town surrounded by conservative men pastors, you may not have a colleague in town who wants to study with you or who can. And so studying needs to take those forms for sure. There needs to be dedicated reading and dedicated thinking and dedicated quiet. And at least one day a week should be sermon day. And it's one of those places where you have if you are doing your administrative work right, no one will call you unless it's an emergency. [*Laughs*]

That's why you have a secretary. A secretary's supposed to run defense, [*Laughs*] especially on sermon day. The other part of study just learning from people is—that's why colleagues are so important. It's a time for reflection. Either if you're an introvert through journaling and other sorts of things. But even if you are an introvert, having other colleagues to reflect off of and to listen to their stories is critically important for longevity and survival in ministry, I think.

I mean, even as a seminary professor, going to gatherings of colleagues who are ministers in Atlanta Presbytery once a month was not only wonderful to just listen to each other's ministry stuff, but to make friends in the ministry who may or may not have been doing pastoral ministry but who were validated and who understood that we all were doing this together and had insights that I may not have had. And. . .

Interviewer: Would you say that many or most pastors are able to find colleagues to have—with whom to reflect?

Interviewee: I think loneliness is the biggest problem that pastors face. Honest to God, I do. I think just being—feeling isolated which I see if you're a solo pastor in a rural area feeling like there's nobody else around to talk to. I think that leads to a lot of pastoral depression. And this is why I think some areas can be very, very helpful in helping to create and foster cords of students, of alumni who can gather to go ever quarterly to bounce ideas off each there and who covenant to pick up the phone once a month and just talk. Just call. Sometimes that's all it takes is a phone call just to say how you doing? No agenda, just checking in.

Interviewer: Right. Thank you. The group also identified the theme of **emotions**. This is very non-technical, the whole joys and sorrows. The range of feelings that pastors have.

Interviewee: Pastors needing to be in therapy, period. Pastors need to be in therapy. You're carrying a lot emotionally, most of which you can't talk about.

Interviewer: And is that sort of the better you are at knowing your people, the more you need it?

Interviewee: [*Laughs*] Yes, because the more of their stuff you know and are charged to hold sacred, the more you need a space where you can unburden.

Interviewer: You say things so clearly and dogmatically. That sounds like an ideal or a command. Do you think in the world of pastors that you know about, how do you think pastors are dealing with emotions and. . .

Interviewee: So the ones I know, some of the most successful pastors I know do good at therapy and do tend to their health or have other ways of tending. But the people that get hurt when you don't—well, the ones—for the pastors I've seen, the people that have tended to get hurt when they don't do this are their spouses and their kids. And I've seen it over and over again.

Pastors committing adultery with somebody else. Pastors overwhelmed with depression. It takes a toll on the family when the pastor's not tending to themselves. And it takes a toll on the solo pastor or the single pastor when the pastor's not tending to themselves. So that's what I'm seeing. And I know that pastors don't do it enough and don't prioritize it enough. But that whole you can't love your neighbor if you don't love yourself thing [*Laughs*], like the seminary president preached in chapel recently. But I don't know that's not right. I don't know that it's not right. I don't think—I do think there's some truths to the need to self-care if you're doing to care for others.

I mean, people who do that in emergency situations know that. People who are trained for emergency rescue know after they've had a terrible calamity and thousands of people have died, they need to go in and get self-care. Pastors don't always get that. And it's usually little things. And the smallest thing can trigger a memory or trigger a bad history. And the next thing you know, you're spiraling and you don't realize you're spiraling. And you have no one to catch you.

Interviewer: Thank you. Last but not least. The group identified the theme of **pastoral identity**, distinctive ways pastors exemplify God's presence. I referred to wearing the uniform. But tell me about pastoral identity?

Interviewee: That's so different for every pastor. Golly. I think it's just very different for every pastor. I haven't even a clue where to begin with this one.

Interviewer: Well, like in the black church would you say there is a general, a dominant tone for how pastors would talk about themselves?

Interviewee: Well, they'll call themselves pastor. They self-identify as pastor in a way that maybe some other churches I might say I'm a minister. But pastor means something different in the black community than minister. So it is a semantic difference, but it is actually a definitional semantic difference. It does make—it's a slightly different semantic range than just a minister.

Interviewer: Say a little more please.

Interviewee: Well, pastor means a person in charge of the congregation. It also assumes power in leadership and administration in a way—within a community that emerged out of segregation. Not all black churches obviously but the black churches that emerge out of segregation. And those who come from that trajectory, the pastor was one of the most important persons in the community. And often the most educated person in the community.

Interviewer: So pastor just speaks power and respect.

Interviewee: Authority.

Interviewer: Authority.

Interviewee: Power too but authority. It's an authorial—not authorial, authoritative and sometimes authoritarian aspect to being pastor. Doesn't always have to be authoritarian, but it's always authoritative in a way that I don't think happens in mainly white churches. Mainly in white churches, the pastor is much more willing to see their pastoral identity as a member of the community who happens to be set aside to do this work. I know.

But I'm first of all, a good neighbor, first of all a good citizen, first of all a good friend. And constantly watching how I am in the world because I know that people are watching me or people might be watching me and might see this guy who looks like the bro acting like an idiot. And then find out on Sunday, oh, that's the pastor. [*Laughs*] But there's something different—there's a different kind of respect that pastors in the black church community have than anybody else has. You can have a Ph.D. and not have as much authority as a pastor.

Interviewer: In the mainline?

Interviewee: In the black church.

Interviewer: In a black church?

Interviewee: Yeah. It's really quite amazing. It is a different kind of authority. Again, I think some of that is an African retention. I think there's some of that that is an unexamined African retention having to do [with] the role of the spiritual leader and the communities of West Africa.

Interviewer: So that doesn't map with academic credentials?

Interviewee: Not at all.

Interviewer: It's something else?

Interviewee: Well, 'cause academic credentials weren't even accessible [*laughs*] until very—those sort of academic credentials is such a recent phenomenon in the black church. [*Laughs*] I mean, you're not talking of credentials. Well, I got credentials. In the mainline church, it's harder for me to think about it because I've been in the mainline all my life. And since my father was a pastor. My uncle's an ordained minister, and he was a pastor. I'm an ordained minister, and I've lived with ordained ministers all my life.

So I don't have a lay person's view of the ministry. I have kind of an insider view of that group of folk. And I don't always see how we are seen by others who are—well, we who are in the mainline church. And that's partially because again, when you're a kid in the parsonage, you see the pastor's warts and all. [*Laughs*] They're not some special holy person. They're just your father. And it's harder for me to map that. . .

Interviewer: But would you say that mainline ministers would say well, I'm not a holy person, especially—

[*Crosstalk*]

Interviewee: I think most would say they're not a holy person especially. I think most would say that they're trying to live the Christian walk or trying to live their Christian faith. But they wouldn't see themselves as the exemplar of all things holy. I wouldn't allow or wouldn't want the community to place that upon them whereas for those who are pastoring the black community whether or not they want it that's what they're gonna get. [*Laughs*] They're gonna get it regardless of whether or not they want it 'cause that is how—that is the role of the pastor.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Interviewee: The pastor and the schoolteacher were the two most important people in the community.

Interviewer: Well, thanks.

Interviewee: And they're often married to each other.

Interviewer: It's a great combination. The first lady.

Interviewee: Right. Exactly. And I mean, it is at that level where—again, this comes from a time when one could not imagine an African American couple in the White House. So the first ladies of the black community are the pastors' wives.

Interviewer: Well, thank you. This is extraordinarily rich. And I have to keep restraining myself 'cause we're not—we're having a research interview and not a conversation. But thank you. Thank you very much.

Databank

Transcript: Faculty Member of an Episcopal Seminary

I conducted this interview with a member of the faculty of an Episcopal seminary for the study eventually published as Lincoln (2020). I transcribed this interview myself. I have made a few edits to preserve the anonymity of persons and places mentioned in the interview. Prior to the interview, a focus group of professors at this seminary identified six themes important to the lifeworld of being a priest serving a congregation. I used an open-ended protocol with six questions to ask in the general form "Tell me about X." I have bolded the names of themes to signal transitions to the reader.

Interviewer: Thank you for agreeing to this interview. In a focus group that I recently led, your colleagues identified several themes about being a priest serving a congregation. I'm going to ask you about each of them. I simply want to hear what you think about each of them. The first is **Liturgy**.

Interviewee: In the Episcopal Church, the Book of Common Prayer guides what we do. But there are a lot of choices to be made. There are distinct seasons in the church year. The planning highlights that seasonality. My own congregation has a leadership team of parishioners and staff people. The rector—the head priest—is there and the music director, lay readers. We brainstorm together. I'm in a large congregation. We have a system. After a season happens, we analyze it. Do you want these details?

Interviewer: Whatever you want to say.

Interviewee: We make notes for next year. We are planning six to nine months out.

There are always teams of people from different aspects of the congregation working together because my view of a congregation is that God's already at work there before you have any of these hired people. Their job is to sense what God is doing in the congregation and to help those people go to their next place, whether it's liturgy or outreach ministry. We are always asking:

What's God doing here? How can we use this particular thing, like liturgy, to help us answer our call at this exact place? It's very much a call in context, and how does this fit.

Interviewer: Does this happen in most smaller parishes, too?

Interviewee: It should. [*laughs*] That's how I teach.

What's bedrock for congregations is their understanding of their particular call in the context of what God doing in the whole, what's our piece. Whether you are a tiny or huge congregation, that's the basic question.

Interviewer: Please tell me about priests serving congregations and **Catechesis**.

Interviewee: I'm going to put catechesis and formation together. I think preaching and teaching and equipping members is all one thing. In preaching and teaching, I'm trying to help the congregation with its discipleship. In teaching, there are some things you need to *know* in order to be a good disciple. You need to know the life of Jesus and some things about the traditions of the church over time. That's in order to help you be a better disciple.

To me, preaching is connected to liturgy. In preaching, I'm trying to make the Gospel really present. If I take people inside a gospel story, I think about it as a sacramental. On Sunday morning, we are always gathered for the eucharist, a sacramental setting. I see preaching as the sacrament of the Word. I am not so much conveying information as trying to make something happen, make the good news really tangible through words. Again, that is toward building up a community of disciples so that the gospel is real for them and they can climb inside the story and be the story in their own setting. So, preaching is formational.

Interviewer: Is this sacramental view of preaching widely shared?

Interviewee: A lot of people would say it. It's harder to make that happen. It takes a different kind of speech. We start off informationally: this is what I want to say, how I want to say it. But can you present it in a way that makes it real. Not overtalk it.

Teaching is conveying information. It can be lively. When I teach in a congregation or here, I try to draw people in, have them do something with what's being taught. But that's about knowing things that need to be known. It's different from an *encounter* [*vocal emphasis from interviewee*].

Interviewer: Thank you. Another theme is **Formation**

I teach New Testament and formation. I say: everything you do in the parish is Christian formation and everything you do in the parish is Christian formation.

Interviewer: Is that confusing?

Interviewee: We spend an entire semester working that through. Vestry meetings, gathering for an outreach project, practicing with lay readers—all of that forms

them as disciples. If you are reading the word publicly for the congregation, you need to inhabit that word, be familiar with it. You didn't just dash into church and read it poorly. You should have some devotion for the word. That's an example of reading being formational. If we have an outreach project, it's so important to reflect on what we learned about Christ in the other, Christ through ourselves. When we don't guide people to reflect on things, we lose formational opportunities.

We should think about that in advance. For instance, vestry meetings are an opportunity for the leadership to think clearly: What is God calling us to? On the ground, what things do we need to make that happen? Nuts and bolts: do we need money for that? Do we need people? What do we need to do this ministry that we are called to do?

So preaching, teaching, formation really work together. Even administration is formational, how we treat the people we have hired. We want to show people what it means to be a disciple twenty-four hours a day. By treating people fairly in our organization, the church, it says something about how they should treat their own co-workers or employees. Treating people with respect, paying them fairly.

Interviewer: What's the priest's role in all of this?

The priest is the person who has been trained in the Scriptures and the traditions in order to bring those to bear. The priest should be so flexible to be able to open up the Scriptures and say, this passage is pertinent to this thing we are going through. Or go to the tradition and say, you know, Christian people have wrestled with this before. Here's a time when they did, and this is what they did about it.

The priest has given his or her life to be a source for all that. So before a vestry meeting, we meet with the senior and junior wardens and talk about the issues and about what scriptures or aspects of tradition we are going to bring as resources to this. We need to make those links really clear.

Interviewer: Do priests in the Episcopal Church do this kind of theological reflection?

I think they want to, but stuff is flying at them. Sometimes people lose the bigger frame because they are so concerned about what's coming at me today. To do this kind of work, you have to take a step back and say: we might drop a couple of things while we get our framework in place. If we don't get our framework in place, we will lose our sense of mission. [Doing this] has made a huge difference in our congregation.

You have to be on the ball and have a clear sense that, that's your project. It's like gardening. You have to be a gardener about that all the time.

I worked in a congregation for a long time, so that's my world more than some. That doesn't make me an expert. I'm just explaining why this is so present for me.

Interviewer: The theme of **Administration** also was identified. Please tell me about priests and administration.

I think priests are managing money, time, and people all the time. What is sometimes challenging for clergy and congregations is understanding the kind of energies involved in money, time, and people. Money is not our dirty little secret. This is where studying the New Testament comes in. Money is an important factor in Jesus' ministry. We have the names of the women whose money supports him. Paul names the people who support his ministry financially. It's interesting that there are these women who manage their own funds in a culture that did not make that easy for them.

Congregations are confused about the role of money. I see it as all of the energy that goes into work during the week is turned into things they really value like supporting their family and their church. Money is kind of like alchemy, to be able to turn one use of energy into another.

Time is a different kind of energy and people are another kind. I hear people say weird things like "I don't have that much money so I'm going to give my time." Well, they don't really substitute for each other. Those are two different kinds of energy. Even if I don't have much money, it's important to put some of that energy in, and some of the energy of their time in. This needs good management.

Interviewer: Do priests spend too much time, not enough time, with administration?

Interviewee: A lot of priests are afraid of administration, especially if they think they don't know much about money.

Regarding human resources, it's important to recognize and foster leadership. We are afraid of making distinctions among people. That doesn't serve us very well. We are loathe to recognize that people have very different kinds of gifts. Some people are very good leaders; some are not. You can develop leadership, but not in some people.

I don't think priests spend enough time, when newcomers come, getting to who they are and what they bring to us, using that human resource well so that that person has a sense of their ministry. If they have the potential to be a good leader, you make something of that. You don't waste it.

Interviewer: How do priests discover these gifts and graces?

Interviewee: Usually, it's haphazard. I'm opinionated because I teach about this. I'm always saying: just invite people to lunch. Say: so, tell me about you. It will be fun, instead of waiting for a crisis to happen to enter into someone's life. Or waiting for them to complain. Or thinking that, magically, they will come to your office and express a great interest in something. Just get to know them.

Interviewer: That doesn't happen frequently?

Interviewee: It's partly the putting-out-fires thing. Sometimes priests don't think they should have fun taking a new member to lunch. They should be taking care of the person who ill. My dad was a pediatrician. I was familiar with well-baby visits. Congregations should have well-baby visits [*laughs*], well-parishioner visits. I don't think people think that they have time for that.

Again, it's taking care of the big frame of us instead of the fire that's burning in front of you. If you can get stuff in good health all over, you won't have as many fires. And the fires that you do have will be worthy ones instead of ridiculous crap. [*laughs*]

Interviewer: Your colleagues identified the theme of **Presence**, how priests are open to God and others. Please tell me about presence.

Interviewee: One thing I work on academically is the cultivation of a practice. [There is movement] from being a novice to being very skilled, an expert or having a thoroughly-integrated practice. Presence is about getting to the upper dimensions of practice. Able to be open to what God is doing right now and flexible in response. Knowing what's important in a given moment. For instance, I can put this down and attend to this person. It's the ability to know what's the important thing at this moment, whether it's a person or a task or doing nothing.

Being open to God and available to others are not two notes of this. That's what's happening all the time with someone who is really present. They are grounded in a sense of what God is doing right here, right now in this moment and *therefore* are open to this person in front of them.

Interviewer: So if a priest is in the dark night of the soul. . .

Interviewee: I should take care of that, instead of bucking up so I can function today. If you are going through your own dark night of the soul, it's having the courage to attend to that instead of putting on a façade and trying to get through. Sometimes you just have to get a grip on yourself and get through the day. You need the courage to recognize that something is dark for me and the courage to function well with others even if God feels so non-present right now. [Even] that's an availability.

Interviewer: Thank you. Let's move to the theme of **Outreach** as it relates to priests in congregations.

Interviewee: The congregation's discernment of its vocation is important to outreach. Their outreach should start with the needs of their particular context and the nature of their internal resources of time, people, and money. What are our people called to? What are they good at? What's in our immediate context? From there it attaches to something more global. Sometimes you might do something that your diocese asks you to do.

My congregation is downtown. Homeless people used to live in a park across the street. The city decided to put its resources for the homeless about a mile away across the interstate. The city was thinking: where are there no tourists? You could be jaded about it, but the city did a really good job. Someone gave

our church a huge kitchen for a ministry that we are down-scaling. But now we provide fifteen hundred meals a week at the homeless shelter. We cook, transport, and serve. It's needed because the shelter doesn't have resources to feed that many.

We are near the renovated symphony hall. We have a strong music program. Now we will do something educational and have a dinner before a symphony concert. We are always looking at how we can engage our context. That's what congregations who get a sense of their mission do. They engage their context.

Interviewer: What about smaller parishes than yours?

Interviewee: I have worked with tiny congregations, like a dozen people, in Wyoming. They have bi-vocational clergy. They don't pay them a salary. They usually have contributed to their education.

One of my favorites said, there is an alternative high school across the street. It's for kids who were not able to make it anywhere else. We asked the principal how we could help. This principal was really open. So, they do lunch sometimes and after-school tutoring. They take kids on outings to places they have never been, like Devil's Tower. These kids didn't even know about camping even though they lived in Wyoming. No wonder they were having trouble in school, they weren't living an engaged life.

There are lots of stories like that, where small groups of people in small towns knew what was up.

One group advocated for the building of a retirement center in their community, because they saw that people were having to go so far away.

Another congregation of thirty had a house connected to their church. There is a regional hospital in town. The people raised money in the community and renovated the house as a place where families could stay when they come because someone is in the hospital. They are excited. It's beautiful. They take turns doing laundry and cleaning the house.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Interviewee: Not at the moment.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Databank

Overarching Message: Texts

The following texts are taken from interviews conducted by the author in 2008 at one Protestant seminary. Participants responded to the question "Does the seminary have an overarching message that it communicates to students?"

Each number marks the response from a single student. Those numbered 101 through 158 were first-career students (i.e., under age 30 when they started the MDiv program). Those numbered 201 through 263 were second-career students (i.e., age 30 or older when they started the MDiv program).

To protect the anonymity of participants, whenever participants used the name of the seminary, I have replaced the official name with "the seminary" or "this seminary." These texts reflect verbatim transcripts of people talking. Thus, the grammar of these interviews is not perfect.

Do students identify an overarching message or messages?

101

For us within the community, it is to raise up leaders for the kingdom.

Outside the community, it gets me back to the days when people were in the back of Currie Dorm, just drinking and smoking. What kind of message are we sending? It makes me upset. When I read "Be an exemplary community" [on banners on campus; from the seminary's mission statement]. . . It makes me question what people are saying outside.

Another thing that might be humorous: Send us preachers who are not boring. Someone made the observation, why would you say that? What will other people think?

I don't know how outsiders think of this seminary. I imagine, if they are seeing some of the things that are happening, [they would say] This is a seminary? Some of my friends have this stereotype that people in seminary read the Bible every day, they pray. They stay in their room like in a monastery. But it's not like that. I tell them, "No, people go out drinking. They go to Sixth

Street." It's embarrassing. I'm not saying that people who don't [drink] are better than others, because that's not the case.

102

Community, community, community. [*laughs*]. That really is it. Hopefully, it's an encouraging, supporting kind of community. It's hard for the spouses to come [here] and leave everything behind. They're stuck here and don't know what to do. They have a really good spouse group that helps out with that. The community really is supportive.

103

Working in admissions, I can cheat on this one. I have practice. This seminary trains people to be pastors in a community.

104

When I came here, everybody said that community was a big thing at this seminary. In parts, it has been. In other parts, it could be stronger. A couple of us felt that it [sc. community] got separated by Nelson House, all this fencing that separates us into three distinct parts. You've got the dorm, then the bomb shelter, the fertile crescent and the leper colony. It feels disconnected sometimes. I'm glad that they're bringing all the housing to one central location. That really facilitates community.

I think community is our message. I really like the lack of academic competition, compared to what Princeton seems to have. There's community not only between the students and spouses, but also faculty and staff altogether. There is a genuine sense of caring among everybody that you don't seem to get at every seminary.

105

I think maybe the official message might be different than what the students might want to portray.

[Interviewer: What's the real one?]

We're an open place for people to come discover. . . I don't like that language. Even though community is the cheesy buzzword, . . . We are an open community for people to come and discover God.

106

I don't think it has one. That's the problem.

We're an academic institution. We're a block north of a state university in a very democratic, liberal city, so here, the idea of one message, or one truth, or one claim that we're making, doesn't permeate this atmosphere at all. If you do that, you're viewed very skeptically, because you are making a truth claim. So if I come here on the campus and say, Hey I've got four passages in the New Testament that clearly state that Jesus Christ is THE only way to heaven, I've got arrows pointing around at me from everyone saying, No, wait. How can you say that? Or if I say

scripture's completely authoritative, I'm going to get questions, and there'll be no agreement on stuff like that. So if there is [a message] maybe it's like, there is no truth. That kind of mindset. I think that permeates here.

But I don't know. If there's been one, I've missed it.

107

The word community comes up for me. I think that starting with the orientation, building that community, having different experiences with all aspects of the community, and now being in the company of new pastors and knowing they will be with me when I leave as a support network, and the involvement of the alumni, I think that they promote community and pastoral support.

108

I can't think of one thing that trumps everything else. There's a little bit of everything here. People from different denominations, backgrounds, views. It's a hodgepodge, so I don't see one dominant theme.

151

It promotes a strong message of community. This message of being together and working together is supported by most of the faculty and staff.

152

Friendly but academically sound. Very innovative faculty. Solid education within a caring and nurturing community. Strong focus on being excellent in all areas of theological education.

153

Upon entering seminary, all of the seminaries I visited stressed the importance of community. While I have an intimate community on campus I do not feel we are united as a larger community. I am happy with the community that I have, but I am disappointed with what was promoted as community and the reality of the "community" we are in.

154

It's a school with an emphasis on community—that not only the academics transform your spiritual journey but also the people on that journey with you change your life. Also an emphasis on preparing for "practical" ministry—to preach & care for a specific congregation after ordination.

155

Educate and prepare future leaders of the church.

156

Here men and women are trained to serve God's Church with a specific emphasis on the Reformed tradition.

157

I came here because I heard it was a seminary that prepares people for the parish ministry. It also is big on community. I found the latter to be more true than the first. Having worked in churches prior to seminary, I think honestly that 3 years really isn't enough to prepare someone to go out into the parish, esp. if he/she is to go out in a solo position. But they try. It would behoove the school to offer far more "practical' workshops. But I realize I am off on a tangent. The message for community is strong and unique.

158

From my time and experience at this seminary, I find the Seminary as a whole to promote theological education and preparation for Christian ministry. The seminary is diverse and offers a variety of resources, both physical and spiritual, for the students, faculty, and staff. Community is a very important element of Christian faith and the seminary offers wonderful places/space for the students to grow, be challenged, form relationships, and find and listen to God, as the Spirit of Christ works in and through us. I am truly blessed and grateful to study and be a student at this seminary, and feel that I am receiving a valuable and transforming education for ministry.

201

This seminary wants to develop pastors who live out a genuine faith in the midst of the realities of this present time. We want people to be Christian disciples and help others to become part of church in this reality. They're not afraid to take on the culture and the present structure and figure out how that integrates, how God is speaking in this time, how are we responding in this time. We have a foundation in our history. We know who we are, where we come from. We embrace that in the dynamics of where we are today. That's a powerful message. We're not clinging to the old. We're not just looking to the future. We want to be alive and present, the body of Christ now.

202

The dominant thing that I perceive this institution is saying, "we're all the church, Presbyterian, Methodist, Pentecostal, it doesn't matter. We're all the body of Christ. This seminary is going to provide the best theological education that we can." The administration and board give me the impression that they want to do that, to educate ministers of whatever stripe.

203

The message is the community message. The statement is the winsome community message, here we are to have a theological education, but the most important thing is that we maintain community within our group that includes faculty and staff. I'm not sure everybody feels quite as included. Everyone doesn't have the same community experience.

204

I think it's be as you are and accept challenge, and explore about myself so that I can help others.

205

Aren't they big on being "a winsome and exemplary community?" [quoting from academic catalogue] Having made fun of that a little bit, I do think that the school promotes that message.

The school sees itself as having the niche of preparing people for parish ministry. They do a reasonably good job of that, too. But you are not precluded from going on to a Ph.D. by coming here.

206

Beyond the obvious of trying to prepare people for ministry? Just wanting to prepare students for ministry in a very positive, warm, caring way.

207

I heard a student say the Presbyterian faith. . . and for me that clarified how I see what this place is projecting, a Presbyterian world view of the body of Christ.

208

This place reminds me of George Whitfield and John Wesley. This institution is Presbyterian and it believes in a higher level of academics for the student—We are trying to train these people academically to serve the needs of the church.

What they need is a little more Wesley. It's not just all academics. What we need are ministers of the heart as well as the head. When I've said that in class, I've gotten all of the Presbyterians upset including the teachers. The goal here is that they are trying to produce an academically higher student where they need more of a heart.

251

There is a deeper river that flows underneath which is perhaps the greater impact of seminary for all of us. We are turned into dependent people and more independent people at the same time. We need one another but at the same time are made to stand alone.

If there were a surface argument. . . It's a process of being prepared and being sent. We are challenged on many levels to become capable with the result of getting ready for real world ministry, courage in facing situations they've never had before. Being confident in ourselves and getting through it.

252

I think that the message may be changing. It has been about community and producing pastors/ministers. I think the message now presenting, whether by volition or not, is growth and expansion, with what end for that growth not really part of the message.

253

I can't think of one, except maybe living on campus, I feel there is a strong sense of community. The housing is one of the main reasons that I chose this seminary over other schools.

254

We are a seminary that prepares people to be pastors.

255

I think the message will be to help Christian community to train a pastor or Christian servants with the best knowledge in biblical languages, as well as other theological and ministry skills, to serve the needs of our community of faith.

256

Faith seeking understanding in community.

257

The seminary's dominant message appears to me to be a message of preparation for pastoral ministry. That message includes providing a balanced curriculum in skills needed by a pastor.

258

Engage in a meaningful, reflective, serious, and purposeful theological study and education for Christian ministry and service.

259

I think this seminary really wants and generally succeeds in welcoming, connecting, and deepening students into the worlds of theological and pastoral inquiry and reflection.

260

The dominant message that the seminary promotes is that the school wants to challenge any preconceived notions one has regarding: theology and life in a community of faith seeking to expand both of these through academic work and life with others.

261

We are interdependent.

262

This seminary describes itself as preparing pastors for parish ministry—and I agree with that description. Most of the classes I have taken have included an emphasis on how the information being learned has relevance for the larger community of faith. The overarching message is that we—as Christians, as seminarians, as God's beloved—are called to love and to serve in concrete and practical ways.

263

Being a non-Trinitarian, I have been in "translation" mode since I got here. As such, I bend themes, as much as possible, to my own pitch and can't really, or won't, identify (with) an overarching message. . . unless it be that this seminary seeks to equip, challenge, and enable its students to be fair-minded, critical, faithful ministers.

Databank

Call to Ministry

The transcribed interview excerpts in this document come from participants in my dissertation study (Lincoln 2009) of the social world of students at one Protestant theological seminary. I compared the experiences of first- and second-career students. Each participant is identified below with a number followed by the letter F or M. Numbers beginning 1xx refer to first-career students; numbers beginning 2xx refer to second-career students. F refers to women; M refers to men. Thus, participant 101 M is a first-career male student. Participant 102 F is a first-career female student.

Practice your coding skills with this data set. Each response was to the open-ended question, 'Tell me about your call to ministry, the perception that God is leading a person to a particular form of Christian service." The grammar in these texts may sometimes be rough, reflecting how participants actually spoke.

What subthemes do you discover? Refer to the document Check Your Coding *for my list of subthemes. For further practice, code the data while attending to what was said by women and by men. What, if anything, changes in your analysis?*

101 M

Some people say that they've been called at a particular time or a particular moment. I knew from the get-go, ever since I was young that I've been called to the ministry. God's been revealing it slowly: where my strengths are, where my weaknesses are, where my passions are.

But when you're younger you want to be ambitious: I want to be a doctor, I want to be a professor of some sort, or a pediatrician. That's actually what I wanted, but I felt that God was closing that door and God was [saying] "I want you in the ministry."

It really didn't hit me until my senior year in college. You have this feeling when something's right for you. I knew I wanted to be a pastor.

My undergrad and even in seminary, and the fieldwork course I just took, reconfirmed within my heart that I'm wired for the ministry. In my fieldwork, my supervisor was talking to me

and said, I can see you doing things other than ministry. But I can't see myself doing anything else beside the ministry. I totally believed that that's what God had shaped me and wired me for. This is who I'm meant to be.

So, that's my call to the ministry. It wasn't glamorous. It was just consistently throughout my life. It was reconfirmed by God, by the Holy Spirit speaking to me, "This is what I want you to be."

102 F

I first started discerning my call when I was in college. I was 18 and I was on the mission field. I realized that I enjoyed being on the mission field more than being in school or anything else. I was with the North American Mission Board, with the Southern Baptist church. So I took time out of college and did two years with the international mission board.

What solidified my call was, I was preaching in my home church. I hadn't really told anybody at the church yet that I was working on discerning this call and I'd already looked at the seminary. I preached, and I had eight people that come up and said, "Have you thought about ministry?" The congregation was affirming my call.

Your call changes when you're here. You come in with that notion, "I'm going to be out of here in three years. I'm going to be a solo pastor." This summer I did clinical pastoral education. That was where I had a lot of discernment. I found out that I believe I'm being called to hospital chaplaincy. My call changed because of doing CPE.

I had a medical background. I used to be an EMT. I was worried that my background would interfere with ministry in the hospital, because I'd be thinking medical stuff. It didn't. I worked with psychiatric patients all summer and loved it. So, still discerning. Always discerning.

103 F

My call has happened over a lifetime. My family was always heavily involved with church, so I always felt called to participate and be in leadership. I also took part in youth groups and camps. I loved it. In high school, I became an elder. I participated at church and at presbytery level, synod, and General Assembly.

My family was involved in two new church developments. That was my main experience of church. New developments take a lot of energy. I had amazing pastors.

I never imagined myself working in a church. I did not see myself as a teacher. Teaching from the pulpit and in the classroom is a huge aspect of being a pastor. Growing up, all my pastors taught classes for kids. I didn't see myself in that role.

I went to college to do a biochemistry degree. I was going to go to medical school. As I got closer to taking the MCAT and applying to medical school, it didn't feel right. I stepped back and took time off from school, insanely, with only six credits left.

I was a camp counselor and volunteered at a homeless youth clinic, public radio, and a non-profit youth music organization. Even though I was involved in these other organizations, I wasn't involved in church.

I worked for a clothing company for a year.

Then, one of our designers was murdered. This woman's murder really affected me. She was amazing. She wanted to do good things in the world. She wasn't religious in a mainstream church way. She grew up in church. Her stepdad was a pastor. She was spiritual. She wanted to bring light to the world. I knew that her legacy had to continue. Each of us has to do that. Then I knew that it was time for me to suck it up and go back to church. I did.

I talked to one of the university ministries directors a couple of weeks after it happened. She pulled the story out of me. She said, we need to get you involved. Let's start with children's

ministries. They needed an 8:30 a.m. Sunday school teacher for second graders. It took two buses and an hour to get to the church. I knew working with elementary kids would be a challenge to me. But I also knew that if I wanted to get involved with church. I said, let's do it. So I taught Sunday school for a long time.

What I found teaching Sunday school was that the part of me that I didn't think was there, being a teacher, was there. I was good at it. I could engage people. I even taught a two- and three-year-old class once. I figured, if I could teach two- and three-year-olds about the Bible, then maybe something else was out there for me.

When I looked back over all my volunteering, I realized that my life was not taking me in the direction of science. Even when I volunteered at a youth clinic, ostensibly because I was going to medical school, it was more about community-building than medicine. Community-building was always a big part of who I was, getting to those outsider parts of the community: homelessness, youth issues, the arts. Those issues were fulfilling, and the work was great, but I knew that there was more. I wasn't sure what that was going to be.

I'd felt even in college that I wanted to further my theological education. I didn't know where that would go. I didn't think it would lead to a pastorate.

The day after I turned in my application to the seminary, I was offered a promotion at work. I asked the seminary to hold my application. I was worried that I wouldn't be accepted because of my college grades. I felt that I needed to be in Seattle another year. It was a great year. It affirmed my calling to seminary. I had developed relationships with the youth at church. I was having a great time. But I knew I was being pulled towards the pastorate.

104 M

I grew up, born and raised in a Presbyterian church. When I was an undergrad, I really wasn't too involved with church. Then my wife, then my girl friend, and I started going to a Fellowship of Christian Athletes. It was great to have a source of spiritual development and connection away from my home church, while I was at school.

I was going to college for a digital media degree. I loved video games growing up. It was an escape for me. I wanted to work on them and make them for other people to enjoy. The further I went in my program, I knew I wasn't feeling complete internally. I didn't know if that was the right thing for me.

My junior or senior year, I didn't feel that I was doing what God wanted me to do in life. For quite a few months, I prayed about what direction God would like me to go, where God could best use my talents and gifts and abilities. That's when I felt called to ministry. I felt tugged to go into the church. At first I thought, "Really, God? You want me to go into ministry." So, I talked to my pastor. We talked about it and I felt it was the right place for me.

I visited seminaries and ended up at this one.

The further I get in seminary, the more I feel my call reaffirmed. That's good for me.

I'm excited to get out in a church and help people. I'm a people person. I love helping people, talking to people. I'm about relationships. That's one of the gifts that God has given me. I can help strengthen people's relationships with God or relationships with one another. I've had that reaffirmed over and over throughout my seminary experience. My call should be to service in a congregational work. I look forward to serving.

105 F

I felt I wanted to do something that helped people, but I wanted to do it in more of a secular way.

My mom was a youth pastor and a Christian educator. I really didn't want to do church work. I saw that as her business, and I didn't want to follow in her footsteps. I wanted to go to med school and be doctor and do something medical. I wanted to have a ministry but I would have called it more of a secular ministry.

The summer before I went to college, I was on a mission trip to Mexico with some middle-schoolers and clearly heard the call to ministry. It was a very bizarre experience because I had never really felt called in that way before. I had never really thought about going to seminary. It was kind of a 180 kind of thing.

When I was in college, I was involved in a church in Fort Collins, where I went to school. My senior year, I had an internship there with the college ministry program. I had opportunities to feel out that call and see if I heard God right or if I ate some bad beans that day. I had really great support from the pastors at that church, and they really helped me define my call.

I came to seminary right after college. I found out that I really love being in the congregation. Before I came I didn't know if I wanted to do nonprofit work, or maybe the dual degree with social work. But coming here and taking Stan Hall's class, I realized that I really love the liturgical aspect of the worshiping community and want to serve a congregation. That was the biggest defining moment of seminary as to my vocation.

I still don't know what I'm vocationally called to. I have some ideas, but I don't know exactly what that will look like. I have some inklings. I don't want to do youth ministry. Youth ministry is wonderful. I just don't think that's where I'm called. Maybe I will be an associate pastor for missions, or evangelism and outreach, or pastoral care.

I've taken pastoral care classes with Allen that have been really helpful. Very concrete. He picks good readings, has good lectures, and good discussions.

Professors here are open to talk about call, but I think it's an individual thing. It's not necessarily part of the curriculum to help us find our call. It's underlying issue.

The curriculum is more about are the tools you're going to need and less about finding your call. It would be hard to have a class about finding your call. It's a personal responsibility to seek that call and have conversations about it.

106 M

I came to know Jesus Christ at age nineteen, like a lightning bolt, and was a new person in two days. Immediately after that I was called to Young Life, a high school evangelical outreach ministry. I despised Young Life when I was in high school. I went because of cute girls, but God called me into a ministry I hated.

I have been either leading or involved in Young Life as much as I could for the past eleven years. As of now, that call hasn't changed, and I consider myself very attentive to God. I put intimacy and time with Him and my relationship with Him as primary in my life. Young Life remains my calling until God gives me the green light to move out of that ministry, which I am welcome to do at any time. He's Lord and I'm not.

My baptism of the Holy Spirit happened at the end of this past summer, in early September. It introduced a whole new dynamic to my ministry. I did an internship at Hope Chapel, which is a charismatic, nondenominational church in town. This semester I've seen a few signs, a few wonders—easily 15 to 20 spontaneous healings. Words of prophesy, words of knowledge, just some of the fun stuff you see in Acts. So my baptism of the Holy Spirit offered a new dynamic into my walk and into my calling.

I don't know where God is going to take me just yet. There's a possibility of becoming a youth pastor within a charismatic church while still leading Young Life and being able to be a bridge between the church and a parachurch ministry. As of now, that's where I am in the ballgame.

107 F

I'm PCUSA, so there was a great emphasis placed upon your call, how did you discern it, describe it, so after all of these things, I just got sick of talking about my call. I don't think you can make it through seminary if you don't think you are called by God. You need God's help for every single paper, every single class, everything. So to have the affirmation from my home church and presbytery guiding me through the process has been very helpful. When I came here I felt I was being called to camp and conference ministry. There's no real focus on that here, but I felt that if I got the foundation of seminary, I could do that if I wanted to. Now that has shifted and I feel more called to parish ministry. So I think it's crucial for people to keep discerning their call, and keep questioning where God is leading them.

[Interviewer: Do you know why your sense of call shifted?]

I have a lot of experience in camping ministry and youth ministry, and my undergraduate degree is in physical education, so that's where I feel comfortable, and I didn't know if I would feel comfortable if I got called as a solo pastor. I didn't feel prepared. I didn't feel ready. I think that's the shift through my classes. I feel more confident.

201 M

I was born and raised in the Roman Catholic tradition, for the first 21 years of my life. In the second 21 years of my life I was in the American Baptist Church. I have a really beautiful heritage. Both parts of those traditions and my wife's tradition don't see eye to eye. I see them as part of something bigger.

One of my reasons for coming to seminary was because my call to ministry is more than a denominational thing. I don't have a language for it yet. I don't really identify myself as "former Roman Catholic, currently American Baptist." I identify myself as a Christian. I don't see us called to be denominational people. It's to call us beyond that. My perception of my call to ministry is to appreciate that and to stand firm in those things and those structures, but to look beyond them. Coming to seminary enabled me to meet more brothers and sisters with different traditions and backgrounds. I've been invited to be who I am and to get to know them and share with them. That's a great testimony to how we do things at this school.

It's a challenge to live into my call. If I went to Liberty's seminary program, I would be trained to become an evangelical Baptist pastor. Here, I can explore the depth and richness of a call to ministry beyond a narrow focus. I've been able to explore my gifts and then ponder where they would best fit in ministry in a general sense, not in Baptist ministry.

I've discovered I have a particular affinity for pastoral care and how that can be integrated with preaching, visitation, Bible study. This seminary has helped me engage the depth of what call is. It has challenged me to see call as more than plugging into a role. The seminary has broadened my sense of call to understand what being a disciple of Christ is, as opposed to just being a Baptist or a Methodist or a Presbyterian.

202 M

When I really started feeling the call, it had been year since I'd been in church. My wife and children had joined the Presbyterian church. When their letters of transfer were sent over, the Methodist church also sent mine. We all joined the Presbyterian church in Big Spring at the same time. People knew my wife and kids, but I worked most Sundays. I'd walk in and they thought I

was a stranger. I began to feel being called to go back to church. You get that little feeling in your head. It's just like somebody's in the pick with you talking to you. I finally decided to start back to church. Not long after that, I got Saturdays and Sundays off. No longer any reason not to go back.

The longer I was in church, the more I was asked to do. I realized that I was supposed to do some form of ministry. I didn't realize at first exactly what that was. I retired early, at 52. I got a pretty good package. By then, I'd started looking into seminary. There was no longer any reason not to go. When I first got involved with church, I went in and talked to the pastor about it. She hooked me up with the people here. She was a graduate of this seminary. I was on the admission director's mailing list after that. Every time something came out, I got a copy of it. A year after I retired, I showed up down here. I was here a year and a half and turn chicken and ran, but I came back [*laughs*].

203 F

I didn't grow up in the church. My dad's Jewish. My mom's a Roman Catholic. She had fallen away from the church before we were born. Growing up, I had little education about the church and Christianity. I didn't understand the basics of what made you Jewish, or Catholic, or Muslim. For me, religions looked like families of a kind. My parents divorced when I was young. I saw my dad's Jewish family connect on a cultural level, Jewish culture. I wanted to belong to them when I was with them, but I knew that I was not quite Jewish. My mom's Catholic, so that's not kosher! I spent a lot of time with my mom's family. All my cousins had gone through their first communions and catechisms. I hadn't experienced any of that. I belonged to these families, but I didn't belong to these faith-families. I was excluded.

In school, I missed references to Christianity found in literature.

I didn't join a church for noble reasons. I joined because I wanted my daughter to be in the Mother's Day Out program. We joined the church when we had one child and the second was on the way. I was baptized along with my second child, who was a baby, and my first child, who was 18 months old. I was about thirty, in January 1998. Baptism was a choice. By then, I had developed a faith. I could stand up and proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, as the vows asked me to do. That only happened because many of the people involved in the Mother's Day Out program embraced me. I felt that I was part of a faith family. This was the shibboleth, the password, how to be allowed in. It has to do with faith and love and community. It's different from believing in Santa Claus like my Catholic cousins, or eating kosher food like my Jewish cousins. I was included, surrounded by love and acceptance. I had not had that experience before in a church or a synagogue.

Once I felt included, I was sopped up into the leadership of the church. I led a renewal conference of 500 where Will Willimon was the speaker, before I even knew why you were being renewed. I didn't have a theological basis for what I was doing. I knew I was doing it as a member of a faith community. I did children's ministry and women's ministry. I did some legal work for the church. That integrated my previous life and my current life.

As my service grew, people said I should be in the church's leadership. The day before that conference began, I miscarried and we lost our third child. The way the church embraced and loved us had a profound effect on my husband. He had fallen away from the church in his college years, but became more involved. He thought my involvement was slightly naïve. When the miscarriage happened, he was drawn back to the church.

He thought he was called to ministry. I thought "Good, it's you. I don't want it to be me." He quit his job with the law firm. We sold our house in Houston and went to Explore Seminary Weekend. While attending, one of the professors confirmed my call. A couple of the professors said, why don't you come, too. Then, after we had sold the house and were eight weeks away

from moving, my husband said that he didn't feel called any more. We had discussions with our pastors. We eventually decided it was a transitionary call, a movement to go out from where we were. That was painful for me, because that was the only church I'd ever belonged to and the only church family I had ever known.

We spent eighteen months in penance in Tulsa, Oklahoma. It was very hard. In the Bible belt, in Tulsa, some of the ideas about love and community looked different from what I had known. I heard a different gospel message from my old church. When I would say in Bible study, "But Jesus Christ came to save the whole world," I was almost kicked out. I heard very conservative views. After 18 months we decided we couldn't stay in Tulsa any more. The walls were closing in on us.

My husband started looking for a job and was offered one job, in Austin. We came to Austin and joined a church. Within a year I was on staff, and less than a year later I was applying to seminary. It was a combination of the community's call and my sense of God's urging.

I had gut beliefs when I came to seminary. When I heard that theologians like Augustine had perhaps the same ideas that I had, I thought, "Wow, that's cool. He's thinking like me." Because of the academic program, some of these gut ideas solidified into new foundation, different in some ways from what I came to seminary with.

204 F

I think my call is was like a living being, it grows.

I had a small specific call a long time ago. God called me to do his work, 10 or 15 years ago. During college I was involved in mission and did that. I traveled a lot (Africa, Europe, Asia), that affected how I saw God and the world. Then I went back to Asia, and saw my sister in San Francisco.

Some friends invited me here and we looked around the state university, and then I saw the sign for the seminary, and looked around. It looked very different, new buildings, not classic style old buildings. I saw one person, and grabbed her and asked about the place and she asked if I wanted to go to the admissions office and said why not? I was interviewed right there. I took my TOEFL exam and was accepted two weeks later. I had friends who said I should go to seminary, but I wanted to explore myself more. But that is what happened.

I started at MATS but transferred to MDiv because I thought studying theology will deepen my understanding. I have experienced a lot, but not studied, so I filled some gaps in that area. When I talked to some pastors back in Korea, they were becoming very enthusiastic and feel some need of women ministers. That was shocking really, but then I transferred to MDiv program. At the Korean church here I was very well accepted and worked with the youth group. But after a year I really hit a wall. There are power games going on and unnecessary things, then I found out I became one of the issues for them to fight about at that church. I felt I had too much to deal with and was fed up with all of the ugly stuff. But I was powerless there and couldn't do anything. That made me think, is that truly my way to answer the call? Then I worked at the hospital as a student chaplain, and that really helped me.

[Interviewer: So, you worked with youth at the church and then you worked with the chaplaincy course.]

I thought I was going to end up with church work and saw myself ending up in the church. But it is hard to say that the church is not ready to accept me. I saw that. So that was really hard. It was the middle of December. I found myself nowhere. The Korean church just is not ready, then do I have to work in the American church?

Then I realized I have the heart for the Korean church here in the States, but they don't belong to this culture, this society almost at all. When immigrants have a hard time, they don't know where to go, most people go to the church. Mostly it sounds like social workers or govt. organization could do it, but because of language and not doing things right and fear of being rejected, they end up going to the church. Sometimes they choose illegal ways from misinformation or what, it causes trouble and people being in a bad situation. But I saw that there was no person in the right place or knew the situation. We have students or people working at Samsung or people have a small business, but there is no one who knows the govt. system. While I was working at the hospital, it worked well for me because I worked in the hospital in Africa. I gained some cultural competencies, and it worked well for me. I learned of people with problems who had trouble getting medical help. So I thought maybe this was the way I could help the Korean church. If they learn the right things and a better way, they could belong to this society better and faster. But the Korean church is nurturing but keeps them together and doesn't give them the right way to do things.

205 F

I had not remotely considered ministry until the last week of September in 2005. A friend of mine called me to see if I wanted to have dinner with her and her family. Over dinner she said, "You know, I've got to tell you. I've been hearing way more from God about you than me. And I think you're going into ministry." I said, "Oh no I'm not. I don't want to do that. Do you know what a pain that is in the Presbyterian church? You have to go school. It takes years. And, I don't want to be a minister." She said, "Well, I know you don't. But I really think you are." So we had a laugh about it. After dinner, I was driving home thinking "That is just the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. . . unless I knew I was what I was supposed to do. I guess if I knew that, I would have to do it. Okay, Big Guy, on the off chance that you're serious, I'm gonna have to hear that from somewhere else. Why don't you use. . . I thought for a minute and this name popped into my head, just like somebody had said it out loud in the car: Becca Davies. I thought, by all means, use her. What's my pastor going to do, come up to me in the narthex some Sunday and go, God told me to tell you to go to seminary.

[Interviewer: She is your pastor?]

She is. Yeah, use her. I patted myself on the back for this great plan I had come up with. Then I put it out of my mind. It wasn't even a week later that I was standing in Ann's office. We were going to set a lunch date to talk about this book I had read on her recommendation, written by a lawyer who was leaving his law practice. We set the date. She was sitting down and I was standing up and she put her PDA down on her desk. She got this staring-off-into-the-distance look on her face. She said, "There's another conversation I think we need to have." "Oh, yeah," I said, "What's that?" She turned to face me and looked up and said, "I feel I have to ask you if you've ever considered ministry." Then she spent the next hour and a half scraping me off the ceiling. [*Laughs*.]

So we commenced having this parallel conversation. She's telling me all the reasons I need to come to school here, and I'm saying "Are you crazy? How am I supposed to go to school in one place and live in another place all at the same time? How am I supposed to pay for that? That's not doable." "Oh, they have this thing called Explore Seminary Weekend. Let's just see when the next one is. Oh, it's in two weeks." She told me later that she had never thought of me in that context until about a week before, when she had a strong intuition that she needed to say that to me. So I said, I guess I'll go to Explore Seminary Weekend then. So I went. And that's how I got here.

[Interviewer: Has your understanding of call changed since you started seminary?]

I never had second thoughts. My theory is, if you say you want me to do X, God, and God does X, you should probably shut up because that's probably your real deal. I find that I'm interested in leadership development and I don't know exactly where I'm going to end up, whether it's going straight to a congregation. I'm not sure. Beyond that, I figure God will speak up again when it's time for me to know. Seems to have shown a propensity to do that. [*Laughs*.]

206 F

I guess I could start with Explore Seminary Weekend. I was already taking courses as a special student and thought seminary was something I would do some years out. By the end of the weekend, I was convinced I was being led to apply, so I did, and I was accepted, much to my surprise. I kind of got cold feet. The demands on my family are going to be too much, I can't do this, it was financial demands, I was concerned about my time, I had been a stay-at-home mom, so I was concerned about time and resources. And then I received notification that I was given a good scholarship so the financial piece resolved in front of me. And my husband said, you've got to try this. So that's how it started.

But my call has changed dramatically since I've been here. I'm not sure if I'm being called into the church or not. I'm clear that I'm going to try to get into a PhD program. From there I'm not sure.

I admit to being a bit dismayed about how women in ministry are treated especially in my denomination, and things that I've learned since I came here, and I'm not so sure how well I'll do at ignoring that—in particular because I'm Methodist and we're placed. At first I was testing the water with all of this, I was told not to be concerned that I have family members with chronic illness, that the bishop would take that into account in placing my family. I was then very quickly told by a local district committee that I should expect to be transferred wherever the bishop wants me to go and that my family doesn't matter. And that would be fine if that's the way it is, then I know, but at the same time, the person who went into the committee, the same exact body of people, he was told that he shouldn't worry that his wife has a career as a doctor in town. They'd make sure they placed him so that her job wouldn't be uprooted. And he's not the only male that I've heard who's had that offer. So. . . I'm struggling with that. It seems like sexism but of course nothing I can prove.

So it seems that there's a good-old-boys network in the Methodist Church. The policies that the church has put into place to ensure women are in ministry has pushed the network underground, so it's harder to fight. When it's above ground and you know what you are fighting, it's a little bit easier. But now it's done behind closed doors.

About that time I got a lot of affirmation from professors who said you should start some PhD work, and that was independent of—they didn't know what was going on on the other side, so that was interesting. I very intentionally tried to take on positions in my church again that I had let go due to class work, just to get in touch with what my call had been to begin with. Which was really helpful to do, but if anything I came out thinking I could do either and be happy. I sort of let it go but had two people on staff, both really asked me questions, not pushing PhD, but Michael in particular had feedback from professors who I TA'd for who felt that I was really called to teach, so he was reiterating what he had heard. Just call it a Holy Spirit thing, both on the same day. That was probably really the voice I had to listen to. So OK I'm going to try this and I don't know where it will lead—maybe ultimately to the church. But these voices I respect so much are telling me something, and I think I need to listen. And of course I—there is a desire—I love academics. It's almost too good to be true.

207 F

I look of it in the context of my marriage. My husband and I were both called to ministry. We taught in member orientation classes for eight years, so when he started dedicated most of his time to ministry, our whole household changed. It wasn't a discrete kind of thing. Then my husband told me he received this insight one morning, at the time I wasn't really listening as I think about it, he was weeping and telling me what had happened to him—a vision, I guess.

I never thought of being separate from him, so he was ordained and then he was installed as a pastor of a rural church. Our whole household and children started living the call.

He was pastor there a very short time. He had lung disease and heart problems following a job at Union Carbide. He died July 2 in 2005.

He affirmed my call to ministry and coming here two days before he died. And that is huge in Missionary Baptist. That was the veil for me, there's no place for a woman to be in MB, so I didn't have a clear idea about that. I just knew I felt a very strong leading. I could not not go. I've never veered from that. I just take it a day at a time. I've had a lot of pressure and asked, What are you going to do? I don't know. I just trust God to direct. I've made another pathway.

Databank

Transformation

The transcribed interview excerpts reported here come from participants in my dissertation study (Lincoln 2009) of the social world of students at one Protestant theological seminary. I compared the experiences of first- and second-career students. Each participant is identified below with a number followed by the letter F or M. Numbers beginning 1xx refer to first-career students; numbers beginning 2xx refer to second-career students. F refers to women; M refers to men. Thus, participant 101 M is a first-career male student. Participant 203 F is a second-career female student. To preserve anonymity, I have edited some names and places. The grammar of these texts reproduces the way that participants spoke.

Practice your coding skills with this data set. Each response was to the open-ended question, "Tell me about transformation, the changes that seminary students experience." What subthemes do you discover? Refer to the document Check Your Coding *for my list of subthemes.*

How do the data appear differently when you attend to what was said primarily by women? By men?

101 M

When I started, I thought it's all, "This is the way you should do it, my theology, my view." First of all, my theology is weak. If I got into a conversation with another seminary student, they would blow my mind. I would say my part, and then they would say "What if this, this, and that?" I just got burned the first couple of times. My theology, what I believe, is weak. In that aspect, being in this PCUSA environment, instead of saying it's all about feelings and emotions, has caused me to transform, to know what I believe, my theology.

I'd never seen worship the way that it is done at seminary. That was a big step, to see, it's not going to be contemporary music and then preaching. At first, it made me so upset. [I thought] I don't feel anything in chapel. I told this to Professor Stone. "This is boring. It's so gloomy and dark in there. I don't feel anything." In his class we wrote the worship experience [paper]. I started letting go of my pride. He was like, "Give it a chance. See how it goes." When you give it a

chance, there is a difference. Seminary is a time when you are supposed to grow and transform as an individual and know what works for you and what doesn't work for you. There's this serene, calm, peaceful feeling about the chapel. It doesn't have to be blah, blah, blah, in your face all the time. There's also a lot to be said for just sitting quietly waiting on God. Being silent before God was a crucial element. In seminary worship, you can be calm. It's not all about the music, the lights, the glamour. It's simple. That's one of the main things I was lacking. You know how Pentecostals always have this way of being in your face, worshipping God and going crazy. But there needs to be a balance. I didn't have that balance.

As an individual, I've grown so much because God called me to this seminary instead of Gordon Conwell. There has been a lot of transformation, to myself, my beliefs, what I think, and my preconceived notions of how church should be done. This is not the only way that church can be done. There are multiple ways. It doesn't mean they're wrong. Take something from them. I'm still young. I'm not saying I know everything after three years. I'm learning as I go.

102 F

My congregation back home noticed growth. I didn't notice any transformation when I went back this summer, but they would come up and say, "You've really grown in your faith. You're comfortable in this now." Sometimes the transformation is a slow process. We don't always see it. But when you go home and you haven't been there for a year, they see it and point it out.

I started out single. I'm still single. Some of those things don't change.

Probably the biggest change for me is that I've developed a relationship with my mom since I've been in seminary, which I didn't have prior to that. My grandmother was dying of cancer. My mom started having God questions. Suddenly we could talk about things. Up until that point, she didn't want to hear about faith. And I didn't want to hear about everything sad. So we didn't really talk. But now we have. I've been out to visit her. I became a daughter since I came to seminary.

103 F

My path has become more solidified and affirmed through my experience here. My church process has not been the most positive, so when I came here I felt really alone.

My friends supported me, which was ironic because some of them are atheists. They thought I was going to be a great pastor, which also affirmed my call: If an atheist says you can be a good pastor and preach about Jesus, I think you should go to seminary. That's my new rule.

I moved twenty-five hundred miles away by myself. I knew it would be fine, but I felt out on an island. I was separated from my church. I got here and immediately was affirmed by the people here, the students and staff and the faculty. They were saying, Of course you belong here. That was a transformation, seeing myself as confidently being on the path to becoming a pastor. I could take that back to my church with confidence.

I've seen other people who were challenged by this place. Those who embraced the challenge have been grabbed by the Spirit. They've been transformed. Dan graduated last year. He had academic and theological challenges. He sat in the front of our classrooms every class. He didn't give up or go away. And it changed him. He's still an angry person. But we told him over and over, "You belong here." He proved he belonged here. He showed up. Our professors and other students were therefore willing to engage him.

I've seen other people who were really challenged by a particular idea and went after it, full on, to understand why it made them uncomfortable, to discover what it was that they didn't agree with. Even if their original position didn't change, they engaged the idea that had chal-

lenged them. All of us have come up against that. The more you embrace it, the more you can allow change to happen. It may result in a solidification of who you are. Or maybe a new creation of who you are.

104 M

I noticed my biggest transformation when I took my clinical pastoral education this summer. It was intense, and rough at times. It was a huge personal growth point in my life. I grew tremendously in how to chaplain to people in hospitals, in crisis and tough situations, to read scripture and prayer and be present with them. I learned how big presence is. I got a better grasp of my own feelings and how I sometimes fail. I learned how to be more pastoral. It's been a blessing. There are growing pains, at times you grow too fast. Overall, I don't regret doing it.

In CPE we would meet for a group and write a verbatim of an encounter you had with a patient in the hospital. Sometimes the group would tear you to pieces in a way that would hurt you personally. You'd see your weaknesses or what you struggle with. That's not always a pleasant thing.

CPE helped me figure out what my weak points are and try to address those, try to factor out those growing edges and try to soften them up, to learn and grow from that to be a more complete person. It was tough at times, but overall it was good.

105 F

I've seen a lot of transformation from when we entered to getting ready to leave. And the ones who have transformed the most are the ones who were willing to transform the most and wanted to. There are a couple of people that I would say haven't transformed at all. They came in with their theology and worldview and weren't willing to change it. They were willing to listen to other people's but they weren't willing to let it affect them.

I think we as individuals have a lot to say about our transformation here, at seminary, and whether we're willing to or not willing to. It's been neat to see us all grow individually and also as a class. The first year you are always together in every single class, so you get to know each other pretty well. And as the years go on, you start to separate, and then it's neat to hear how people are being shaped by a class that you're not taking. That in turn transforms you. Just having those connections with other students and hearing their theologies, and things that are important to them.

[Interviewer: What do you think has transformed you the most?]

The seminary answer is the Holy Spirit. My answer would be the Holy Spirit, too, but also a willingness. When I came here, one of my pastors at my college church, we had long conversations about seminary and what it was like, and how it's not just church camp for three years. So I'd been warned about being open, and not having certain expectations, not really expecting anything out of seminary other than to go and experience it. Just be there and not hold on so tight that you don't let it move you and affect you in the ways that it would naturally do so. That was really good advice coming in here.

I still had stereotypes of course, and some of those were smashed right away when I got here. I thought that everyone was the cool youth group church kid coming to seminary. I was afraid that I wouldn't fit in. It turned out to be quite the opposite. Everyone's just normal people.

I think just that willingness to be open to new ideas and not to be scared of new ideas even if they felt counter-intuitive or opposite of what I thought and believed up to this point. For

example, learning about the Old Testament, and the professor talks about Jacob, when he was sleeping and there was a rock underneath his head, he said the rock is as tall as Stonehenge. So what does that do to your theology of scripture when it's like a Paul Bunyan type of story?

I'd always had a pretty literal interpretation of scripture growing up. So just thinking about that and being, like, Whoa! Can the Bible still have authority, and yet maybe that didn't really happen, or the Flood, or Adam and Eve, or pick your Old Testament story. Or even New Testament story. Did that really happen? Well, if it didn't, it's still scripture and it still has something to say to us. So being able to not be scared to hold on so tightly to, Oh Gosh, Adam and Eve didn't really exist to just embracing it and thinking, what does that mean for my theology if it didn't happen?

I'd say there's a lot of transformation in the doctrines.

106 M

I would change that word to more of a solidifying for me. My two major times of transformation, coming to Christ at 19 and baptism of the Holy Spirit at 30, those are my two major times of spiritual getting flipped upside down.

I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but that didn't come from the seminary. That came from Hope Chapel and what's called Kingdom Academy, our school of supernatural ministry there. In fact it was funny because I had gone to Ellen Babinski and David Johnson to say, Hey, will this course count as an elective, and they're like, no, and they blew me out of the water. They said, go ahead and take it, but it's a non-accredited program.

Some people come here to seminary with a very defined faith before they came in. They get a bunch of stuff thrown at them and come out with different ways of thinking. The opposite has happened for me. People were throwing all of these ideas at me, and I'm doing my best to discern, OK, OK I'll take that, I won't take that. That's not accurate; I'm not going to buy that. I do buy that; I'll take that and piece it together. So I'm walking out of here with a very similar paradigm to what I came in with.

So, has the seminary transformed me? [*Pause*] No, not really. I got new material, new information, but in regard to spiritual transformation, or even transformation in character, none of that has come through an academic program. I'm just reading and writing essays. Taking tests. Not much transformation comes with that. The majority of transformation in my life has come from strong encounters with God, or suffering.

107 F

In my application interview I said I want seminary to transform who I am into a pastoral leader. My first year I felt transformed theologically and intellectually. My second year I started feeling transformed more in the spiritual realm, and now I feel like the process of transformation is moving me into the more practical as far as learning techniques, becoming familiar with the book of order, the book of confessions. I would say, all of those areas of transformation have happened for me, classes transforming beliefs, spiritual practices. . .

Getting married was a huge transformation for me. It happened half-way through my seminary career. I think getting married affected a lot of my spiritual transformation.

201 M

My call and faith belief were transformed. You come to seminary believing you're called. But many of us have doubts about that and questions of worthiness. Our focus is often on ourselves: God called me. I'm answering God's call: I, I, I. Then you arrive here and think, "Who am I?" Those doubts that might have been intellectual become very real: should I be here? Every student has periods or cycles when they are challenged, and they question whether they should be in seminary, or they question an aspect of their call. You learn to embrace the question as something formative. The feeling "I can't be a pastor because I'm not pastoral-care-oriented" teaches you that your particular call may not be in that realm, but doesn't negate your call to ministry. That becomes a shaping and a molding. So you get more comfortable with that. You embrace doubt and challenge in a new way. That's been my greatest transformation.

Living with doubt has helped me cope with the challenge of having all my family back in Massachusetts.

We have a unique situation. We live with friend from Massachusetts who professes no belief in God. Some people at home say, "You're going to go to hell. You shouldn't be living there." That's their strong Baptist belief. That's a challenge. My transformation has helped us to live in the midst of that. We're no less Baptist or Christian than before. As a matter of fact, we're better Christians. We're more informed and genuine.

Moving into the midst of doubt and challenge has helped us in a lot of ways instead of being paralyzed or running away.

202 M

I'm a lot calmer now. Most of us are naïve about things when we get here. We're naïve about what we're really supposed to be doing. About the middle of your second year, people come down off their high horse and get in the real world. A lot of the people I started with were single minded, going to go down the road and do things.

Seminary education gives you a pretty good dose of reality about God and the church, and possibly about the whole reason that the church exists.

My attitude now is 180 degrees from what it was when I first got down here. In my previous career, I'd been alone in a pickup truck by myself out in an oil field. I had grown very intolerant of other people, but I didn't realize it. I didn't listen to people. This experience has really changed that. Now, I feel if someone wants to talk to me, they have something they want me to hear. I want to make sure that I hear it. The pastoral care classes I've taken have really clarified that. That's where the change in me started to take place. I became a better listener. In the required pastoral care class I began to realize that I had a problem with my listening.

I had never realized my attitude toward other people was as poor as it was. Now I realize that everybody has a reason for everything they do or think. Sometimes you'd be amazed at what that reason is. To get to it, you've got to be able to hear them.

203 F

Transformation and spiritual formation are my Ph.D. work. I took three courses from Ellen, the Ellen trilogy. I took church history, Reformed confessions, and the piety and heresy class. I've always been interested in the mystics and contemplative thought.

Before I entered seminary, my husband gave me the gift of a trip to a Benedictine abbey in Colorado. He searched and picked the abbey and communicated with the nuns. He thought that

this was a good place for me. I didn't even know that I needed to go to an abbey. But he saw it in me before I saw it in myself.

The night before I left, I didn't think I wanted to go. It would be cold and lonely. But I went. God speaks profoundly in those moments. I was on the top of a mountain and God said, "You are fully accepted. You are fully loved as a child of God." It was as clear as I am saying these words to you now. That's spiritual transformation. You are in God's presence, among some weird nuns who are off praying. I could have been a Benedictine nun, I think.

I had a leaning towards mystical life and contemplative life before I got to seminary.

We are made in the image of Christ. For me, seminary held a mirror up in front of me. Part of the transformation is seeing, with elation, the image of Christ in myself. At the same time, it's hard, and I don't do it well, taking the time to sit and be with God so that God can transform you into that image. It's you and God doing it together. In fact, it's not you, it's God doing it. Seminary held a mirror in front of my face and said: You are fully accepted and fully loved, but you don't believe it. You need to have knowledge of that truth. You don't need to worry about what the professors think about you and what other people think about you, because you are fully accepted and loved. Your self-identity is not in the grades you earn. If you are going to go out and be a person that holds the church with me, you need to deal with it. These are realities and truths you need to grasp. This actual elation and joy, but it's hard stuff because you have other thoughts going through your mind that are not true. It was because of things that happened in my childhood and how I was raised.

It's about you being transformed into the image of Christ that you were called to be and at the same time loving yourself just as you are because that's what God does.

I had a desire for success, self-identification based on my success. I received my acceptance not from God but from those around me. I used the reflection of the image that others had of me rather than Christ's image of me. If you get your acceptance from others in seminary, then you will have problems when you get out and work in the church. Through the grace of God alone I was able to see my problem. That was my Ph.D. work. That needed to be changed. And through the help of the counselor and spiritual director that guided me through those things.

204 F

I had changes every semester, month, and day almost. New setting, new people, that really shaped me into learning new things. I had nothing familiar, everything is so new, even the language is new. The faculty and staff are so nurturing and wait for me to move, they wait for me to move, they just encourage me and support me. That brought me some changes. For me, change, I could think something I couldn't think of before. There was liberation.

I love Korean culture, that's a base, but we have to change one thing—free people to think freely. We have to fit people into the box. In the Korean church, we cannot think this way and that way, but there is an answer and just take it.

But I didn't grow up like that. I love to think and try new things. I love challenge and adventure. But in that setting, I wasn't fit. But why I wanted to be a missionary, I can try new things and explore but with a good name. No one could stop me because I was doing missionary work. Which I love to do. But there is another reason is probably because I wanted to escape from that oppression. I spent 7–8 years in the mission field with strict doctrine and way of doing things, but because it was outside of Korea I could try some very wild stuff and explore things. So when I came back to Korea I realized that I cannot fit in any categories. So I struggled for three years. I felt like nothing allowed me to be myself.

But after I came here, that pain, this seminary helped me to be healed. Everyone here, no matter what I did they were encouraging and saying I was doing a good job. And I believed it!

I explored myself and the classes. All the classes make sense, and I sometimes contribute my Asian woman's view, and the professors agree with me. So that is a good discovery.

205 F

I was going around saying to God: "Minister? Are you sure? You must have made a mistake. I don't think we're on the right track here. You surely must be making a mistake." I've come to live into that [calling]. There are other ways that I've grown that I don't recognize. People at my church have said to me, "I can tell you've grown and changed." Okay. It's probably true. But I can't articulate how. I haven't sat down and grilled them to get at exactly what they're talking about.

I think I've grown into the idea of pastoral authority. I've figured out some ways to wear that hat. I'll probably figure out some more in SPM.

206 F

I entered school after having vowed I would never go back after my undergraduate degree and now loving it and even considering going on further. So clearly I've undergone a huge transformation. I remember taking classes as a special student because I didn't think I could pass. So I had to prove to myself that I could do this. So I guess I'm doing OK. I guess just coming in and thinking that this is truly a call, and it may be to a single vocation, but realizing that there might be more to it than I see, has been pretty transformational.

Seeing some of the underbelly of the church that I didn't know was there as part of our process. And I went through a time when it was really disturbing. More than it is now. I can talk about it now more easily. So learning that it was there was transforming. It sounds silly to say that because of course I understood that this was a human structure so there had to be human finitude riding along with everything else. I guess I had maybe that Book of Acts vision of what the church really is. And coming to that it's really not was difficult. So I'm coming to grips with what does that mean for me and my attitude towards the church, and being able to say, yah, it's all right. I understand and I'm not 100 percent there and I don't know with this means for me and my ultimate relationship with the church. That's part of my call—where I'm going and what I'm doing I don't know yet. I'm OK that it's not a perfect institution.

207 F

A young student was helping me with Greek. I was really struggling. She said to me, "You suck!" Now, I've taught a lot of classes and never motivated my students by saying, "You suck." But OK. She's right. So help me! That was transforming for me because I realized she felt comfortable enough with me that she could tell me exactly what she thought about my performance. Maybe she was savvy enough to know I needed to be shocked. I don't know.

At my age, I realized that I had spent a lot of time trying never feel shame, but I failed miserably at the languages and . . . the assistant dean sent me a letter that you have failed these three things, you failed, you failed. I had never failed before, especially intellectually. I had pride. Pride that if I really applied myself, I could always succeed and excel. I was in advanced classes and had such pride in that. But I had put every effort into the work here and I had failed. That was transformational for me. To fail, and yet not be a failure.

I was grateful for failing and not letting it define me. Now I know what it is to try as hard as you can and still not measure up to some standard. It was the greatest gift to be told I sucked.

Because of my failing, I have a better grasp of the languages than I ever would have if I had just gone through the classes once.

I think the thing about pride and being concerned about what I like look. It's not me anymore. I'm representing God in terms of the church. That's the overarching thing. I believe that God has called me to a purpose, and however I function in that, I do not want to disappoint God. I just pray to God to hide me in His Word and not let me be a distraction.

Databank

Life Management

The transcribed interview excerpts reported here come from participants in my dissertation study (Lincoln 2009) of the social world of students at one Protestant theological seminary. I compared the experiences of first- and second-career students. Each participant is identified below with a number followed by the letter F or M. Numbers beginning 1xx refer to first-career students; numbers beginning 2xx refer to second-career students. F refers to women; M refers to men. Thus, participant 101 M is a first-career male student. Participant 102 F is a first-career female student. The grammar in these texts reflects the way that participants spoke.

Practice your coding skills with this data set. The theme called "Life Management" refers to a student's life outside of the demands of seminary. What subthemes of this overall theme do you discover? How do the data appear differently when you attend to what was said primarily by women? By men? Refer to the document Check Your Coding *for my list of subthemes.*

101 M

In my first year, one of the seniors told me, "Be sure to have a life outside of seminary. Join a fellowship. Do something outside of the dorm." That's what I've been doing. I've been going to a small Bible study, Korean people, Asian actually. That's really been therapeutic. It gets me away from the WTS community. You're with the community, studying with them. In every single class you see the same people. It's crucial that you do something fun. You have your Sabbath. You go to the gym to escape. That [advice] has stuck with me. I see the fruition of it now that I'm a senior. I want to tell the juniors, "It's OK. It's not about the grade."

You need to learn how to balance. You need to see how you take care of yourself as well as take care of business. Over the years, I'm learning more and more about myself. I know where my limits are and when I need to take a break, balancing, not procrastinating. It's important to be involved with the community but you also need time for yourself to get away from that.

102 F

I'm lucky because I don't have a family to worry about. I don't have to worry about the family duties of raising a child. Most of my life is here.

I've done a few things outside of the seminary. I took ice skating lessons. Otherwise, I'm pretty much here. I live here. I work here. And I study here.

103 F

There is no life outside WTS. Timewise, there's very little other time, which is fine.

I still have friends back home, from all the places I've lived, that I talk to.

You can get off campus easily. I don't feel stuck on campus. I have a job off campus. I go to museums and hear live music. You don't have much time to do those things. That's fine.

The reality of life in seminary is that you are mostly on campus because of classes. I work on campus, too. Your friends are mostly from school, too. It's harder to make friends outside of school.

I haven't established a particular church that I go to. I often go to University Presbyterian, but sometimes I go to Central. I also preach a lot. I haven't established a firm church home here in Austin. When I go to church, it's really good. I do stuff with the UPC young women's group. That group has women from a diverse spectrum of ages and life experience, from a 19-year-old to a 90-year-old.

104 M

I've been blessed with being married to a wonderful wife who likes do outdoorsy stuff. She gets me involved and brings me to do a concert or a picnic outside, or just camping, traveling. It's been great having the wife who'll help you to enjoy what else is here outside of the seminary experience.

That's a tough balance, 'cause you do have so many other things to consider outside of seminary. Even practical things, keeping up with your church and dealing with other things your church requires. I mean being Presbyterian [??] and CPM, just working with the church and experiencing the worship service yourself, which can sometimes be lost in the seminary hustle and bustle.

I enjoy kayaking, or simple things like going to a movie. Where I can engage in something fully, other than like the readings for my classes. I think that's an important balance to try to keep in your life. To keep you sane in some way.

105 F

I don't have much of a life outside of seminary. The church I go to is my SPM church, so that's related to seminary. And I was there last year, too, working in another position. A couple of years ago I talked to the pastor about transitioning into the SPM from this youth position I was in. So last year was sort of seminary life. I work on campus, so I don't have a job off of campus other than SPM. All of my friends are here.

It's not that I don't get off campus. We get out and do stuff in the city of Austin. We don't just sit in our apartments studying all day long, but relationally speaking, I don't have a life outside of the seminary.

I don't really have a community outside. I don't just know people in Austin who aren't related to the seminary. For me it's OK. I don't think it's OK for everybody. I think some people need that outlet outside of the seminary. It would be hard if I was staying in Austin and moving off campus, say if I had a job at UPC or something. I would have a community there at UPC and I would have to get to know people, but if I was staying here I think it would be hard to just uproot from one community to the other since I haven't had any outside involvement really. I think part of that for me was not expecting to be here more than three years.

There's quite a diversity of people on campus, even though we're all seminary students. There's a diversity of opinions and theologies and interests. I hadn't thought before about not having a life outside of seminary. It just seemed natural, I guess.

106 M

Have a passion for ashtanga yoga, a very disciplined form of yoga. Do that four or five times a week. Love it. Go out swing dancing quite a bit. I used to teach when I was in college. Austin has a wonderful Lindy-hop swing dancing scene. Love to hang out with friends. Watch some football.

Love one-on-one time with people at coffee shops. A piece of being in youth ministry is be who you are. Do what you love, and take students and other leaders along with you. So a lot of my passions I just take with me. Students get to see that and there's a freedom to that. So there's enough time.

I'm at a huge advantage. I'm on the Montgomery GI Bill from my time in the military. I was a 91 Bravo, a medic. I haven't had to work during my seminary time. It's a huge advantage and a huge blessing.

107 F

The first year it was, I'm pretty good at time management, and so I got most things done, except for all of the readings. It was impossible. That group of friends I mentioned, we started hanging out and doing fun things around Austin. I started dating Trey that first year. I know a lot of the juniors feel overwhelmed—like polity bowl football practice they are saying, no I have to study.

It's been important to me to balance the fun stuff with school. Being able to go to movies. . .

The second year it got harder, Trey and I were engaged, we were planning a wedding for Christmas, and then I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease and had surgery all in the same semester. I was completely overwhelmed and I really wanted to take some classes off because I didn't think I could do it. Then it became more important to me to schedule the exercise and the fun times.

And keeping my relationship with my family 1000 miles away was important for me to have that week off to go see them. I enjoyed going to UPC at their worship, and I enjoyed being able to do that off campus other than the worship here.

108 M

For me it's very critical because I'm married and a father. We weren't planning on having children during seminary, but ended up with twins.

I try hard to make family first. Studies and classes come second. It's forced me to make changes. I have limited time to study. I've had to learn to say "no" to things. Because I physically can't do things I used to do. People ask you to go out after class and I can't do that. I don't go to

Manna anymore because I need to get home and help Vanessa with the kids. I've taken fewer classes these last two semesters because of the kids, so I can spend more time with the family.

I'm trying now to graduate sooner. I was planning on taking a full fourth year, but because of the family situation. The kids are growing so fast that we want to get them out of the little apartment, so I'm pushing to graduate sooner. Life management is one of the most important things to me on this list. . . just taking care of my family.

201 M

Life management is tied to my spiritual direction experience. I wasn't sure how to juggle all the challenges. Moving from Mass. to Austin was a big change. Moving from small town life to a big city was a big change. The change in academic demands from my undergraduate to WTS was overwhelming at first. The challenge to step up [academically] is a strength of this school. There is integrity and substance to it. If I run into a WTS graduate, I expect that they've gotten a solid foundation.

Most of my life has revolved around trying to live into the challenge of WTS. I've learned that I have to make time for play and relaxation. I have to keep my family an equal priority with pursuing my MDiv.

I'm blessed with a wife who wants to integrate her life with the seminary process. She's our sole income. She feels a burden. It may be our greatest challenge. I would work, but she knows that would impact the learning process. We've accepted the challenge. We have to minister to each other.

We have an older son, so we don't have the daily responsibilities of parents with young children. We have no family support, no one who lives in this area.

Because we don't live on campus, we don't have that support. I see my friends [who live on campus] going to dinner once a month with their friends. We don't have that experience. Perhaps we could, but I don't know if we'd have the time.

I really try to confine the academic part of my life to Monday through Friday, nine to five. I want to keep weekends free for family, congregational life, and worship. I've gotten better at that. Initially it was hard. Now we have a good rhythm.

202 M

At this point in my life, there's really not a lot more than what I'm doing right now in seminary. I'm looking forward to getting out of here and having a little more variety again. Going to seminary just about takes up all my time.

I go back home very chance I get and visit with our kids. The oldest son is in Hobbes, NM. I like to go up there. We've got our church activities at the little Hyde Park church and our neighbors out in Manor.

203 F

I was crazy. I had my last child in kindergarten, and two weeks later I started seminary. Why didn't I take a year? Because I did not know the amount of academic work and spiritual formation required.

My spouse is a saint. Before seminary, he worked and I was at home a lot. I was with the kids more than him. He wouldn't proclaim himself a feminist, but when I started seminary, we both became parents. If a kid got hurt, instead of calling "Mom!" they called "Mom and Dad." My

husband did all our laundry during my first year of seminary. I didn't do any at all. He's taken off work when a kid got sick so I could go to a necessary class. We've had to learn how to balance what that means. It's been good for our family. Our family has gelled together in regards to child care. When one of us can't do it, we call on a third party to do it.

We don't have as many social activities outside the seminary as we used to. We try to have date night. It doesn't work out a lot of the time. We would like to take more trips. Because of the demands of my education, I'm on somebody else's schedule, the schedule of several people. That dictates not only my life, but my husband's life and his schedule, and my children's life to a certain degree. We've had to learn as a family to work within that life rhythm. We are all in seminary together. My husband has chosen to change his priorities. Is my career going to be the most important thing, or can I choose not to go to that client dinner because Laura [the respondent] needs something or the family needs something. It changes our perspective on things. My calling to seminary is part of all of our lives.

My kids have theological discussions on the way to school. I had two little girls in my car. One of them said, "God's in control of everything." My daughter says, "I don't know if God's in control of everything, and this is why." Hmmm. Things have changed. The way we lead our lives is different. I'm not even sure I'm here for me as much as I'm here for them.

204 F

It was going to the Korean church and working there as a youth pastor, and hanging out with Korean church members. I have a friend who is very active going out to parties and stuff, and she helped me, and got into other Asian groups, and had good contact with them here.

205 F

When I started out at seminary, I was still practicing law. I was trying to do what I had done at home in seven days in three, still be active in church and do all those things. CPE and school have shrunk the law practice so it's less and less burdensome. I still practice some law, but not as much as when I started. That's okay. It's been pretty busy.

206 F

When I am finally called up to receive my diploma, I ought to haul my husband up with me because he's been fantastic. I could not do this without him. He was used to me having a home-cooked meal every night when he got home from work, and the kids' homework done, so it was family time when he got home. All of the good stuff. But it's not so much anymore. Homework usually gets done, but pretty much our first semester we ate horribly. It was pretty much take-out and HEB prepared food every night.

A group of us on campus with families discovered Super Suppers where you go once a month and put together a bunch of meals and freeze them. So that has given me better meals than take out or prepared food. So it's a good compromise.

My kids went for about a year and a half without dentist appointments. Some of those things just fell through the cracks at first, but we've picked those things up.

The person who gets the least amount of attention as far as doctor's appointments and haircuts, etc, is me. I get the short end of the stick. I live with three people with chronic illness. They need their doctors' appointments. I'm the least chronically ill of the bunch, except maybe psychologically.

I wish I got more exercise, I consider that a life mismanagement.

207 F

I have no life outside of seminary.

I have seven children and fifteen grandchildren in my household. There was a lot of chaos when my husband died. He was holding a lot of strings together. A lot of extended and blended family.

I basically retreated into the seminary in a lot of ways. I went to the church we were pastoring for a while, but I realized I was a distraction for the new pastor and his wife. Now I go to the church where I did my SPM and they've been very supportive.

Databank

Emotions

The transcribed interview excerpts reported here come from participants in my dissertation study (Lincoln 2009) of the social world of students at one Protestant theological seminary. I compared the experiences of first- and second-career students. Each participant is identified below with a number followed by the letter F or M. Numbers beginning 1xx refer to first-career students; numbers beginning 2xx refer to second-career students. F refers to women; M refers to men. Thus, participant 101 M is a first-career male student. Participant 203 F is a female student. The language transcribed here faithfully reflects how participants spoke.

Practice your coding skills with this data set. Each response was to the open-ended question, "Tell me about emotions, the feelings that seminary students experience." What subthemes do you discover? Refer to the document Check Your Coding *for my list of subthemes.*

For more practice, how do the data appear differently when you attend to what was said primarily by women? By men?

101 M

When I came here, making a transition from an Assemblies of God to a PCUSA school, it was hard. I was frustrated a lot because of the differences in beliefs. For the first couple of months, it was a hard transition, let alone coming from the east coast to Texas. The more I started making friends and the more I became more comfortable realizing that God wants me here. It's good because I'm not only around AG, around stuff that I believe. I felt that God was saying "Open your mind to all this." It wasn't necessarily AG versus PCUSA. It was AG—Korean style versus the PCUSA style. I'd never been to a PC American service, so the whole chapel aspect was new. I didn't even know anything about liturgy. I've always been in the contemporary mode, if it was at an American church. In a Korean church, whether you're Methodist, whether you're Presbyterian, whether you're Assemblies of God, you run the same ship. It's more the Korean versus the whole American culture aspect.

At first, [my emotions] were kind of confusing. The classes weren't that bad. I was comfortable with the workload. I thought it would be a lot more intense, but it wasn't. It was more laid back, compared to my undergrad. The first year, once I focused academically, it was up and down. Sometimes it was good, sometimes it was bad. It wasn't because of relationships, it was the work load. Sometimes the work load would just come pouring in all at once. Then I'd compare myself to the class under me and I have nothing to complain about. This is my senior year. I'm just having a good time. For the first time, it's not about the grades. I was a stickler in my undergrad. I would always go for the As. I was just going for the grades. I wasn't interacting and trying to learn. Once that got wiped away, it's just good. It's fun hanging out with people, playing football and having a good time. It's been happy. Most often, my emotions are happy, joyful. There are stressful times, but overall, I'm having a good time at seminary.

102 F

The first thing was being overwhelmed. Suddenly, I'm 2,000 miles away from home. I don't know how to get to a grocery store. Then I started classes and was overwhelmed by that. It's that way until the fall break of the junior year. You are buried, and you make it through all those exams and you come up for air. Fall break is one of the happiest times. Hebrew was really hard for me. I have ADHD. When I came here I had a lot of pride. I wouldn't take ADHD medications. So that first year was really hard academically. There was a lot of frustration and anger. I know this stuff but I can't get it out and I need to. Which really abated once I went back to the medications.

There's some nostalgia now. The first year you think, oh, I have two more years. And then the midpoint in your middle year and it's, Wow, I'm half way done. Now it's time to start looking for post-seminary stuff. There's some nostalgia and there's pride. I'm going to have a graduate degree. No one in my family has ever done that. Nobody's ever been to college. That's a big deal for all of us.

[Interviewer: Is it still as confusing as it was your junior year?]

Not usually. I work on campus. I've had a lot of experiences working where you're thrown into confusion, what do I do now. For the most part, it's home and things make sense.

103 F

Emotions are a roller coaster. Maybe not so much a roller coaster, maybe a tide. Emotions feed off one another. There are times in the semester when everybody feels free and happy to get back to classes. Then you start diving into the books and it grinds and grinds.

First semester is different from second semester. For some reason, first semester seems harder.

The first semester of your junior year is when all your emotions come out. Everyone is really excited to be there. It's a high. You're all giddy, and it's fun. It's still fun now, but it's not quite as giddy. Then you hit the sixth class week, and the faculty hit you with all the tests and papers.

People cry. I tell the juniors, "Everyone cries. It's okay." Then you have fall break and it slows down a bit. You think, "I can do this. I survived the worst week of the worst semester of the worst year of seminary." —Until January term, of course, then you have Hebrew.

During finals, I don't come on campus as much, because people are all stressed out and I absorb that. People who are going to be pastors are very empathetic. They absorb everything that everybody else is feeling. It's bad news.

Emotions here go in waves. You've got the highs and the lows. You do it together, which is good. That keeps you balanced and you realize that you're not the only one.

104 M

I was frustrated one time, my first semester here I got a C in the class and I went to the professor to explain and it was one of those timeline things, you know, put in order who came first. And I had gotten the first one and the last one mixed up, so it threw off the whole list. But I had the other ones correct where they should go, so I felt they should be considered right. And that question alone is what dropped me down to a C. So I was extremely frustrated, and I remember the professor saying, "well, you make a good point, but I'm still not changing the grade." That was my first real frustration with the seminary, because you hear all the time they are so grace-full, grace here, grace there, and then you know, I hadn't experienced too much grace.

It has been frustrating too at times about cost of school and the family aspect of catering to my wife and making sure she's happy, and doing things for her while still trying to maintain the grades that can be hectic and overwhelming. Sometimes it's a lot of things. You've just got so much on your plate you've got to keep in mind.

There have been times of great excitement. Joy. Like I said, I love getting together with friends. That's one of my favorite things to do. Get a group of people, hang out, chit chat, talk. There's been a whole plethora of emotions I've experienced from joy, excitement, and in CPE, sadness, just tough stuff tugging at your heart all the time. Especially when you are on call and you get a crisis situation, and you go right back home and think about that for a couple of days at least.

Nervous of what the future holds.

[Interviewer: Right now?]

Yeah, because I have to take some orals again, and I'm really nervous about getting hung up in the process and just not sure what we'd do right after I graduate because you'll be kind of kicked out if you can't find a call right away.

[Interviewer: Kicked out of seminary housing?]

Yeah, so I guess my wife and I talked, worst-case scenario, we'd go back home 'till I could find a call. So there's anxiety in that sense. Nothing I can think of to quell that really, too much. Just got to keep on trucking and keep on praying, and keep on hoping a call shows up so I can take it. That's been my biggest pervading emotion right now—that's anxiety.

Any other emotions you'd like to know about? Probably got every one in the book.

[Interviewer: You've kind of had a wide range.]

Yeah, very much up and down, which I think kind of shows the ebb and flow of life, too. People are always going to have ups and downs. I tend to be more optimistic about many things. Like this injury didn't bug me too much. Kind of kept my head up. Stayed positive about the whole thing.

105 F

I think emotions depend upon what time in the semester. The beginning of the semester, especially the Fall, it's a really happy time, excited. You're getting new classes. You're seeing your friends again after being away in the summer, doing internships or whatever you're doing. So

there's big energy on campus. And then as the semester continues and midterms come, there's a little lull in emotions. And people are hunkered down in their apartments, and dorm rooms and the library trying to get stuff done. It's a little less joyful. At least outwardly. And then there's, Oh the semester's coming to an end, and there's going to be Christmas and things are good. And then there's finals, and it kind of takes a downturn again.

So I think it's an emotional roller coaster, academically speaking and in life.

Especially first year if you've just moved here like I did from a far-away state. You don't know anybody. So you're trying to get used to a new city, find your way around this new place. You're trying to get used to living by yourself. I always had roommates. So that was a transition. You're trying to make friends, get your studies done and all of your reading. So there's a lot. There's a whirlwind of emotions first semester. Not just in life but also academically.

Your faith gets torn down in a way—a good way. And one professor explained it as, first year's all about tearing you down. Second year is about picking up the pieces that are really important to you about who you've been. Third year's kind of picking them up and gluing them back together and placing them in place. That passage has been true for me, emotionally.

I grew up in more of a conservative church. I don't think they kind of knew they were Presbyterian in some respects. They had all of the right pieces of the liturgy and Sunday worship, but looking back on it, they were more kind of non-denominational maybe, or Baptist in the way their theology was. I had grown up in that church my whole life, so not knowing anything else, I was like, Oh, this is what Presbyterian is. And I come here, and Wow, there's liturgy. This is cool. I like this. So part of that was breaking down everything I'd known was not true, seemingly. So there can be a little bit of crisis of faith at points.

[Interviewer: And was there for you?]

Yeah, there was. I'd say a lot during. . . mostly first semester. Probably a little bit during second semester. It was good, though. I'm really glad. And I've come to see the world and theology in a lot broader terms than before.

Emotionally, looking back, there have definitely been ups and downs. I'd say more ups than downs. And even in the downs, they're good downs. Knowing that work is being done but knowing that it's hard work to be done. And so, it's been good.

106 M

I have complete peace in regard to academics, grades, and assignments 98, 99 percent of the time. I have learned over years, and time with the Lord, and some pretty hard circumstances, that if you truly do seek Jesus Christ first, if you truly do seek the Kingdom first, everything else is taken care of.

I spent time in the military before coming to seminary. I had bought a business. I had lost a business. So I've been through some pretty rough waters, compared to maybe some of the other students that come here. So things like an essay [*laughs*] I'm not sweating about. "A" what's the big deal about it anyway? It's not going to follow me out of here. And there's no need to worry.

It's really difficult to worry when you seek Christ first, because you learn that your priority is him, and he fights your battles. He is attentive to you. He knows the number of hairs on your head.

It cracks me up seeing people around here stress and worry and be frustrated and fidget with grades and academics, and I'm honestly thinking, God really wants to take care of this. He really wants to carry these burdens and wants you to cast them and give them to him, and he can give you perfect peace in the meantime.

107 F

You are excited and nervous when you get here. I was a little homesick, and then by fall break, overwhelmed, anxious, wondering if you are going to do it all, wondering if every year is going to be like this.

I think at times frustrated with requirements, church added on to all of the school requirements. I don't know if meaningful is an emotion, but a lot of the experiences I've had were meaningful.

Is tired an emotion? The first year, I feel asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow. I was physically, emotionally, intellectually drained. Now going into my last year, I'm anxious to see what's to come, excited, a little worried about how it's all going to play out receiving my first call. But I feel enriched by the whole process.

201 M

I've never been in a minority position before. That caused me anxiety, but I was given acceptance. I was just as welcome as anybody else. That experience helped me to realize how important acceptance is in ministry, to be open to people, to have a genuine appreciation of others without compromising.

My greatest emotion is blessing. The school blesses us with resources and opportunity that we won't find anywhere else. I can always come back here any time and tap into that.

Overall, it's delightful. I have a positive pile of emotions.

202 M

[*Laughs*.] Where do I start? When I got down here, I probably had an inferiority complex. I didn't think I was capable of handling the academic work. That was chewing on me pretty good. About the start of my middle year, things were coming at me all the time. I had four or five things due on the same day. It was like I had an irrational fear that I was going to fail. About that time our youngest son, who was in the service, got sent to Afghanistan. He went through a divorce while he was there. Things got on top of me so bad, I had to drop my classes and leave. I couldn't stand it.

Looking back on it, everything worked out very well. The boy got through his combat experience without a scratch. He's remarried now and has two little girls.

I was never able to put a firm label on the fear that I was feeling, that fear of failure. It was with me all the time. It had my emotions messed up pretty bad. I had trouble in day-to-day living. When I left, I had no intention of ever coming back.

I was asked to preach when I got home. I knew when I came out of the pulpit that day that I was going to come back down here. I quit fighting it. I did fine after I got back. You still have those feelings sometimes. Nothing scared me off since. I've been a lot more solid since I've been back. My wife said, "Well, coming back, you at least know what you're getting into." Which is true.

203 F

I've done very well here academically. It's given me a necessary foundation. But the harder work was emotional work. I'm in a master's program, but the Ph.D. work of seminary is self-reflection and being face to face with family of origin issues and other issues that I felt, if I took them out and vomited them all over the church, would be bad.

Before I started seminary, when I was on staff at Westlake, I started seeing a counselor who was also a spiritual director. So for me, emotions are not just anger or stress. Emotions are part of spiritual direction.

For me, the hard work of seminary is formed by emotions. Even though I'm getting As, do I feel unaccepted by professors? There's an issue there, a rub that I've had to address. My underlying issues and assumptions need to come out.

You can go to seminary and learn all this academic stuff. But if you don't work on emotional stuff at seminary, you'll be in trouble. You're going to go out and have trouble in the church.

My emotions were up and down, especially my first year. I didn't expect an emotional aspect to accompany the education. I didn't expect a lot of what I experienced in seminary. Insecurities. The stress of going to school again. I thought, I can do this. I've done school before.

There is stress and anxiety around finals and trying to determine if your self-worth is tied up in your grades. As a result, I take everything I can pass/fail now. For me, that's a spiritual discipline. I work just as hard in classes that I take pass/fail as I do in classes that I take for a grade, but I want to get what I'm supposed to get out of a class, period. Part of the spiritual discipline is that I don't talk about that.

205 F

There's always frustration because you're dealing with a bureaucracy on the school side. There's stress because everything is due at once. You have to balance all of that out.

It can also be intellectually stimulating to learn all these new things.

Sometimes it's stimulating and frustrating all at the same time. [*Laughs*.]

On the whole, it's been a rewarding experience and a great opportunity to come and carve out some time to just study. That goes away when you get in the real world.

206 F

I tend to be pretty even-keeled about most things. If anything, I probably err more on the side of trying to bring out positive emotion when people seem too serious. I'll try to lighten the mood.

207 F

Spirituality with physics and metaphysics balance me out emotionally. My husband had a very concrete analytical mind. So he was very balancing for me. Without him, I had to learn to channel my emotions, sublimate, and be more in control of my emotions.

Right after I came here, I was in deep grief and a lot of guilt. I did everything to blame myself, and my emotions were really raw. I was in a very deep hole. So it was quite a rough ride. If I had any idea what I would go through, I would not have done it. But I'm making it through.

Databank

Pastoral Identity

These texts come from a study about what seminary professors imagine that it is like to be a minister serving a congregation (Lincoln 2020). Responses come from professors at five different seminaries, identified here by the denomination or fellowship with which each school is affiliated. Each participant is uniquely named by an identifier consisting of three parts: the name of the denomination, an arbitrary participant number, a letter N or Y and, finally the letter F or M. The N or Y refer to whether the individual ever was a full-time minister or priest serving a congregation. The F or M refers to female or male. Thus, the participant called "Presbyterian 11 Y F" is a person associated with a Presbyterian seminary who has served a congregation full time and is a woman. These texts are transcribed from human speech; there may be grammatical errors. That's how we talk.

Text spoken by one person during interviews has been divided into smaller pieces that focus on one idea. Thus, the same participant may show up in several places in this compilation. To help novice coders, I have grouped texts into several clusters.

All of these texts were spoken as responses to the open-ended question "Tell me about pastoral identity, defined as the distinctive ways in which pastors exemplify God's presence." Things that the interviewer said are placed in brackets.

The document Check Your Coding *lists the subthemes of "Leading" that I identified in this set of data. What do you find? What happens when you use the characteristics of respondents to pull together ideas from, for example, only women or only men?*

Cluster 1

Presbyterian 11 Y F

There's these idealized images of who pastors are supposed to be: holy people, people who are representing the divine.

Presbyterian 03 N F

I think most [mainline Protestant ministers] would say they're not a holy person especially. I think most would say that they're trying to live the Christian walk or trying to live their Christian faith. But they wouldn't see themselves as the exemplar of all things holy. I wouldn't allow or wouldn't want the community to place that upon them whereas for those who are pastoring the black community whether or not they want it that's what they're gonna get. [*Laughs*] They're gonna get it regardless of whether or not they want it 'cause that is how—that is the role of the pastor.

Presbyterian 12 Y M

I would point to Gordon Lathrop's book *The Pastor*, and say, "Read that, and then we'll talk." It varies with congregation. Pastor is etymologically a shepherd, which means you try and protect the sheep without hurting them.

Methodist 03 Y F

And I think the pastor also teaches by the way the pastor lives. So I think we have to realize that pastors are under a certain kind of scrutiny, because they become the exemplars of the faith we think we express.

So I'm asking, "If you think God has this kind of power, what kind of power do you think you ought to be exemplifying?" Is it consistent to think of God's power as more persuasive, yet you're highly authoritarian in your congregation? Does that make sense? And if we believe that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God, what kind of power is exemplified in Jesus' work, and how do you reflect that in the imitation of Christ? So I like to have students thinking about that all along.

But I think if I am living my theology as a way of life, not as a theoretical position, that even my body language will convey the hospitality, the openness, and the welcoming that my theology suggests. A theologian I really like, of course, is John Cobb. He's written a book called *Becoming a Thinking Christian*, and he says most people have two theologies. Pastors may have this, too. One is the theology you espouse; the one you talk about when asked what you believe about X. The other is the theology you enact.

Methodist 02 N F

Sometimes I think the Presbyterians had it right when they called the pastor the teaching elder. I mean there's a way in which teaching that's done by the pastor can cut across all aspects of the life of a congregation, or even into a denomination.

I think pastoral, that sense of having been set apart for a particular work is really important, and to see it as the calling of the church for the pastor—for the congregation, denomination, but also the church wide, having set apart a person for the pastoral office. And in that, they repre-

sent and evoke God’s presence in distinctive ways. I think that it is crucial, and like I mentioned yesterday, to see these collars of people at the Ferguson events, and that it gives a recognition that there is the presence of the church there.

But I also see that there are caricatures or remnants—I guess both of those would be true—of a way. And thinking, “Oh, you’re the pastor, and therefore we have a certain caricature of who you are and how you live in the world.” That can be problematic.

Lutheran 09 N F

I think that preaching is a very important part. In the Presbyterian Church the pastor is called a teaching elder. The sermon in a sense is about teaching. It’s not the only context for teaching, but that is one of the contexts for teaching. What is taught from the pulpit is something that should shape the congregation and its members. So for me preaching is very high.

Church of Christ 01 N F

You are, for better or worse, you are set on a pedestal. You are the example. You must live up to that calling in terms of how you live your life, and how you act with others, and how you uphold the things that God’s called you to.

Church of Christ 10 N F

This week I’m teaching a church history class. We were reading Gregory’s pastoral rule and one of the things he talks about is how important it is that ministers don’t just speak the gospel and then trample on it with their lives. So he uses the imagery from the prophets where the leaders of the people have been drinking clear streams, but they trampled on it and the sheep were drinking muddy waters, as a way of talking about it. I thought that was really a good image for how important integrity of life is for the truth that is spoken, it has to be lived out that way.

Church of Christ 04 Y M

I think that’s because my primary metaphor for what a minister should be, and I think it’s shared among our faculty, is not so much leader as it is more of a resident theologian. I see that a minister is to provide access and leadership in the theological constructs and underpinnings for what we—what the congregation is about.

Church of Christ 11 Y M

When that happens, when the person of the minister’s investment a little bit more authority, it becomes more central to the various tasks of ministry. Sometimes the way that is has worked out is that there has been a decrease in the sense that our job is to equip others for ministry because the minister is the one who is the focus of ministry.

Presbyterian 03 N F

Even though the church thinks the pastor's most important job is to preach, I argue that the pastor's most important job is to know every member in that church and to know what's going on with every member in that church to the extent that that's possible.

Presbyterian 12 Y M

I think everybody wants to be perceived as a good preacher.

Lutheran 04 N F

Sometimes it's hard to think of pastors as human beings. And emotions are what it means to be human.

Cluster 2

Presbyterian 11 Y F

And so pastoral identity can be fraught with guilt of not always being caring, not always being loving, not always demonstrating the justice of God, and being generous to every person who comes off the street asking for money—which often happens. Pastors get people coming in with all sorts of stories about personal hardships.

And so not always having money, or not always being willing to give money or other assistance to people can make a pastor feel very guilty.

Methodist 01 Y M

But we carry a lot of responsibility, and so coming to terms with that, and being aware that we have enormous responsibility. And to me, the other thing about it—and so we represent the office, and I think the office is not nearly as well-respected as it used to be, and for some good reasons. I mean we mess things up. But I think the office deserves to be recognized, but we have to earn it, too, we who are clergy, right?

Church of Christ 01 N F

And yet at the same time to say how can, you know, the minister has feet of clay, and how can a minister really recognize their own weaknesses and be vulnerable with someone, right? Maybe not dumping out their problems to the whole congregation, but that they've got some people that they can turn to for accountability, to hold one another up in prayer, to recognize that you're human just like everybody else is human, and maybe more aware of all of your failings because of your position. And elders are certainly predisposed to make you aware of your failings. [*Laughter*]

Presbyterian 11 Y F

Pastoral identity is complicated, because we have these images of who God is and what God wants us to be. And as persons called to ministry, it's easy for pastors to feel that they're not meeting this image of who they're supposed to be. There's a lot of that imposter syndrome that happens in a lot of other contexts.

Cluster 3

Presbyterian 12 Y M

The pastoral part of being a pastor these days is to be willing to share people's fear and pain and sense of helplessness. To be with them in those places without the illusion that you as a pastor have something that will take all that away. But there's a lot of pain. It doesn't matter what kind of privilege you're talking about.

Everybody's having a hard time in one way or another and being aware of modern life. But the ongoing witness in all is something like, "This world is not an accident. You as an individual are not an accident. There is a purpose. There is a direction. There is a meaning. And we might not be able to see it or understand it, but it's there, and it's real, and finally, through all of it, there is a promise, and sometimes all we can do is hold to the promise. But we can hold to the promise."

Methodist 03 Y F

But I think if I am living my theology as a way of life, not as a theoretical position, that even my body language will convey the hospitality, the openness, and the welcoming that my theology suggests. A theologian I really like, of course, is John Cobb. He's written a book called *Becoming a Thinking Christian*, and he says most people have two theologies. Pastors may have this, too. One is the theology you espouse; the one you talk about when asked what you believe about X. The other is the theology you enact.

Episcopal 02 N M

That role of leading liturgy is not only the most visible because it's the Sunday presence, but also because the tradition tends to be fairly heavily ritualized and sacramental.

And because of that and because of the ways that we understand sacraments presiding of the sacraments is a priestly role. Therefore this is something that priests can distinctly do among the members of the community. So that's, I think, for many of us, that's the thing that most clearly differentiates.

Episcopal 04 N M

One thing that is culturally popular these days that I like and that I'm glad of, is this language of authenticity, and I think maybe this is kind of the Christian version of that language, that you don't want a priest—it's more than just walking the walk. It's about vulnerability. You want a priest that's vulnerable before God and therefore can help other people feel safe when they need to learn how to be vulnerable before God. I think therefore being an authentic Christian,

and a safe witness to other people's journeys is basic to why you would be called to the priesthood or the episcopacy.

In ordination services, it says presbyter. I was ordained a presbyter, but at any rate, presbyter just means elder. So you're looking for somebody that's got maturity of faith, and maturity in Christian teaching, and can help make wise decisions, discern right actions over the local body that the other larger bodies, that the presbyter is a part of and represents, and in pastoral counseling situations.

Lutheran 02 Y M

I think there are some pastors who really—I mean that is heart and soul to how they—to what they understand it means to be a pastor. You know, kind of in some ways, you know, old school. I visit my people, you know, I go see the homebound members, the people in the hospitals; I show up, I'm there.

Lutheran 03 Y M

I think most pastors see that their time and energy is spent and, most of them'll say, ought to be spent in kind of engagement with people in more—what?—in a more pastoral way and not as kind of as the head of an organization. And that's how they understand their ministry and kind of what they're about, and this is maybe necessary but not something they wanna spend a lot of time and energy with.

Lutheran 08 Y M

I think it's a central part. If the word pastor means shepherd to care for how the whole relates and how people treat each other, the atmosphere of the entire group, what is this group about? Is this a group where if you walked in you would sense something of the gospel? Or is this group gathered for some other reason? And I think the pastor is a shepherd of a community.

Church of Christ 01 N F

So it is interesting that even in a congregation where you might be the only minister on staff and may have many other responsibilities as part of your day-to-day work in the church that you're still referred to as preacher. Maybe perhaps that's because that's the most visible area of if a family's not in crisis or not heavily involved in the congregation, that might be the only thing they see the minister do, which lends itself to those jokes about, you know, we're paying you for the hour that you work on Sunday and you've got the rest of the week off, kind of joke. So it is certainly a very visible function of a minister.

Church of Christ 04 Y M

I think most ministers probably hope that they can organize it, delegate it, and it will run smoothly so that they can be about what they would consider the main calling which would be more of a teaching type role. So they would want to delegate that as quickly as possible; most of them.

Church of Christ 06 Y M

I think that Church of Christ clergy function mostly like clergy in other denominations. We use a different vocabulary, but when you actually describe what people do, it's not very different.

Church of Christ 08 Y M

Most of the time the lead minister has to function in both of those realms; to be a good administrator and a good spiritual leader.

Church of Christ 12 Y M

Yes, within our tradition preaching has, for various historical reasons, been the dominant image of the pastor and the role of the pastor is the one who preaches Sunday to Sunday.

I think many of our ministers are sort of the—they wouldn't necessarily use this language; this is where I will probably get in trouble. They probably wouldn't say they are, but they can serve as resident theologians or the teacher of the church kind of name. They're the ones who are sort of expected to have—what does the Bible say about this or give us some resource on this.

I think the churches of Christ, now the pastor leader, pastor, minister, or person has a broader array of tasks, perhaps reflected by this list. They may not spend all the time doing all these things, but it should be a little more diverse, diffuse, in terms of the portfolio that the pastor carries into the congregation's life.

Church of Christ 11 Y M

Delivering. . . There is, among the churches that I'm connected to, a much—so this would be architecturally, but it would also be dress, delivery style, a move down in power distance. So authoritative proclaimer of the word in a suit and tie behind a podium or a lectern, a preaching architectural thing which symbolically meant obviously a lot. We didn't quite get the high Reformational sort of elevated thing, but we had it on the stage. Now that's not Plexiglas, but clear plastic podiums, roving mics, movement around. A much more of a flatter—so lower power distance shrinks in the distance between the congregation in the proclaimer. I think that the clear, clear trend.

Dressing down. I can't remember if ever our current preaching minister wore a tie, certainly not a suit. I just honestly can't recall. The preacher before him, we've been there not 10 years, maybe a jacket occasionally, but probably no tie. So again, kind of looking like you, that would be dressing up. Looking like me would be kind of—is so that general move to shrink the power distance is the term I would use, between the preaching minister and the church [*unclear words*]. That's pretty clear. I see that.

Presbyterian 03 N F

Even though the church thinks the pastor's most important job is to preach, I argue that the pastor's most important job is to know every member in that church and to know what's going on with every member in that church to the extent that that's possible.

My father was a pastor. My uncle's an ordained minister, and he was a pastor. I'm an ordained minister, and I've lived with ordained ministers all my life. So I don't have a lay person's

view of parish ministry. I have kind of an insider view of that group of folk. And I don't always see how we are seen by others who are—well, we who are in the mainline church. And that's partially because again, when you're a kid in the parsonage, you see the pastor's warts and all. [*Laughs*] They're not some special holy person. They're just your father.

Presbyterian 12 Y M

Pastor is etymologically a shepherd, which means you try and protect the sheep without hurting them.

[Interviewer: Do you think that's how a majority of pastors understand their identity, as that kind of good shepherd?]

I think it shifts. Might depend on who they're mad at at any particular time.

Lutheran 07 Y M

But it's faith-based leadership, where you're preaching toward faith, and that changes the world in which people live, and you, if a pastor is clear about that reality and that that's their primary job that they don't have to be everything to all people.

Cluster 4

Methodist 01 Y M

So the other theme that comes to my mind is the theme of authority and pastoral authority, and that, too, I think is kind of tricky. We have a lot of student pastors who are out there, and especially for the young ones who are in their 20s or 30s, and they're serving a congregation that's largely their seniors. How do you claim pastoral authority in that context? In some ways, it's gotta be earned, but on the other hand, there's moments when you need to claim it, and say, "I need to speak as pastor on this."

Church of Christ 12 Y M

Actually, it didn't matter what tradition you are in, at the end of the day, the authority of the minister rests in your character, in your being, your presence, your own discipleship, your own openness to God and your vulnerability before God and before others.

Presbyterian 03 N F

Not all black churches obviously, but the black churches that emerge out of segregation. For those who come from that trajectory, the pastor was one of the most important persons in the community. And often the most educated person in the community.

[Interviewer: So pastor just speaks power and respect.]

Power too, but authority. Doesn't always have to be authoritarian, but it's always authoritative in a way that I don't think happens in mainly white churches.

Databank

Administration

These texts come from a study about what seminary professors imagine that it is like to be a minister serving a congregation (Lincoln 2020). Responses come from professors at five different seminaries, identified here by the denomination or fellowship with which he is affiliated. Each participant is uniquely identified by an identifier consisting of three parts: the name of the denomination, an arbitrary participant number, a letter N or Y and, finally the letter F or M. The N or Y refer to whether the individual ever was a full-time minister or priest serving a congregation. The F or M refers to female or male.

Text spoken by one person has been divided into smaller pieces that focus on one idea. Thus, the same participant may show up in several places in this compilation. All of these texts were spoken as responses to the open-ended question "Tell me about administration, defined as the ways that a minister or priest organizes and manages a congregation's activities and finances." Things that the interviewer said are placed in brackets.

To aid the novice coder, I have organized the texts into several clusters. What subthemes do you find? The document Check Your Coding *lists the subthemes that I identified in this set of data. What happens to your analysis when you use the characteristics of respondents to pull together ideas from, for example, only women or only men?*

Cluster 1

CHURCH OF CHRIST 01 N F

I think it's telling even that you would sort of be apologetic about saying that administration seems trivial. I think that's how a lot of our ministers see it, as well. That in terms of these big

issues preaching and teaching and discipleship, and congregational care, going from one crisis to another, administration sometimes does get trivialized, or pushed to the wayside, or "Oh, I'll read that report when I have time." Or, "We're not writing those reports because we have this or that." Or, "We're just going to have a secretary take care of all of that for me, to free me up for these things."

And yet, for ministers to understand that the day-in and day-out trivial kinds of how do we make sure that the doors stay open, and the bills are paid, and the widows have their visit?

Church of Christ 04 Y M

I would say that most ministers would say that it's a necessary evil, administration, and they don't like it. They hope they can delegate it away. Although, the guy that's going to come in with a lot of programming, will have some way in which they are going to try to administer that kind of programming whether it's through some type of small groups or cells or leadership groups that—to the deacons that have their various ministry areas that they want to—I think most ministers probably hope that they can organize it, delegate it, and it will run smoothly so that they can be about what they would consider the main calling which would be more of a teaching type role. So they would want to delegate that as quickly as possible; most of them.

Church of Christ 06 Y M

It sounds boring to me frankly because it is—some of it is boring. I think even the Holy Spirit would find it boring. Yeah, okay. I think—but it is an area that people need to be able to do for obvious reasons.

Church of Christ 08 Y M

Well, you have to be good at administration. It's a default thing. I would say we do fairly well, but our structure is such that we don't think of the gift of administration being a valued ministry always.

Church of Christ 12 Y M

I think there is a basic expectation. Even though it's about preaching there is also though, so this expectation that even in smaller churches that ministers maintain some office presence and there is a weekly—there's weekly communications, bulletin, or email and that the building is cared for.

Presbyterian 11 Y F

You know, there's something about administration that feels material; that this is something that's observable. And yet it also can feel really inconsequential; like what does this have to do with preaching the Word of God? What does this have to do with the care that I'm providing for these parishioners?

Methodist 03 Y F

> Which is too bad, 'cause these are often the places where students can run into the most trouble. I would say finances in the church are maybe first- or second-order violations of trust of the congregation, because I've seen embezzlement, mismanagement. And the stories get back to us about that. So it may seem mundane, but again, I think knowing how to do proper administration expresses one's theology and responsibility, integrity, authority. So it has to be of a whole piece, not sort of a separate one.

Methodist 02 N F

> And the amount of reports that people have to file; be prepared. And counting, all those kind of quantitative assessments. Oh, administration is very important work.

Methodist 01 Y M

> Well, it's really important. It's important for the pastor to be organized and to have some vision of the component parts of a congregation, the committee work that's gotta be done. But also to have some vision of what's important here, right? We can major in minors, and that doesn't serve us well. So being able to think about where do I, as pastor, need to put my energy? Where does the congregation need to put its energy to do things that matter, and not just things that we may have been doing for a while, but may not carry as much significance as they did?

Episcopal 01 Y F

> Again, it's taking care of the big frame of us instead of the fire that's burning in front of you. If you can get stuff in good health all over, you won't have as many fires. And the fires that you do have will be worthy ones instead of ridiculous crap. [*laughs*]

Episcopal 04 N M

> But I think maybe someone like—take someone like George Herbert who wrote *The Temple* and *The Country Parson*. I don't think he would have used the word "administration" except in the old timey sense of the word, which was just another way to say ministration or being a minister. Maybe he would have—I think he would have probably used the words law, like church law, like make sure your books are kept. When you baptize people, don't forget to fill out the books. That was administration, you know?

[Interviewer: Which is rather a minimalist task compared to take out your calendar and—]

> Let's run these programs. We need five different programs. We need to make sure the kids are integrated.
>
> That's tough. There's a lot of extra work, and they're complain, we didn't really learn how to be a priest while we were here. We learned all this theology, and history, but what we really need to know is how to balance the books, and part of me wants to say, yeah, we should teach practical, on the ground running kind of stuff. I get that. But part of me wants to say hey, you can learn how to run a business—you can get your own online class on that man. We taught you the stuff that tradition has passed down.

Lutheran 03 Y M

But most pastors struggle with this. They don't necessarily see it as a priority, and yet they're probably faced with these issues on an almost daily basis. I think most pastors see that their time and energy is spent and, most of them'll say, ought to be spent in kind of engagement with people in more—what?—in a more pastoral way and not as kind of as the head of an organization.

Lutheran 05 Y F

Administration is a field that I teach, so I feel passionate about it and about the fact that ministry is in the midst of administration. The word ministry is in the midst of that.

Lutheran 07 Y M

Because when pastors who suck at administration try and do it all, their life is miserable and the congregation's life is miserable. Just anecdotally, did a long-term interim not too long before coming to Wartburg, and it was a two-point parish in southeast North Dakota and the pastor who had left was beloved. He was there for ten years.

But when after this person left the parish found out that he hadn't been keeping the records, right? Births, deaths, marriages, et cetera, yeah, for some years. [*Laughter*] And so that breach in administrative responsibility was experienced as a breach in trust. And can we trust the pastoral office? Can we trust the church? We feel a deep sense of betrayal.

And they loved this person, right? [*Laughter*] He was excellent at caring for people, but because—I'm trying to obfuscate it—because the person didn't care for this sort of record keeping, which is part of administration, there was a lot of healing that had to happen, a lot of venting that had to happen. Because that was a betrayal.

Church of Christ 01 N F

And if the reports aren't given around, then the ministry doesn't happen. And if you spend half of the elders' meeting coming up with the agenda because you didn't have time to do it ahead of time, there's something to be said for administration and the ways that it keeps the wheels turning. The trains need to run on time kind of concerns. Which I do think ministers sometimes overlook in favor of the bigger, the weightier, the flashier kinds of stuff.

Church of Christ 05 N M

A minister recently had coffee with me. He was pretty irritated because he was brought in to be the family life minister, somewhat education minister and he was describing to me the chaos which was not done—was not deliberate or intentional.

Lutheran 05 Y F

And so many seminaries, so many schools do not teach that, or think, "Oh, you'll get that later." Or "You'll just either do it well or won't." But I hear parishioners say, "Please, please, please teach

our pastors about administration." And here it's just a joy to work with pastors who know that that's important and that it's a theological task. It's a ministry task.

Lutheran 07 Y M

The pastor has certain responsibilities within the congregation which she or he can't put to anybody else. Right? If the heartbeat of the congregation's life is worship, then the pastor needs to take a certain administrative responsibility in terms of stewarding that, and planning that. Not by his- or herself, but a central role.

There are some aspects of pastoral administration where you got to just, it just has to be done whether you like it or not.

Cluster 2

Church of Christ 01 N F

There's always a balancing act in terms of recognizing your gifts and that you can be an excellent minister and a really disorganized person. [*Laughter*]

Church of Christ 06 Y M

Well, for example, in our church we just had a big Halloween thing. We invited the neighborhood. Several hundred people showed up from the neighborhood. It was all organized by the ministers. They didn't do all the work, but they put together the teams of the people who did it. They organized it.

So I think there's an expectation that the ministers will be organized and they will do organization.

We have a ministry staff of four and we have a non-ministry staff of four or five. I would have to count. Really, you're expecting that—the senior minister, the preaching minister's my age. Others are younger and less experienced and you expect him to be Chief of Staff.

Church of Christ 08 Y M

There are some people that are wired well for administration. The rest of us have to do it anyway too.

A minister has a duty to know where their gifts are, or strengths are and draw upon people to fill in weaknesses and amplify their strengths.

Church of Christ 07 N M

[Interviewer: In some traditions, the minister would spend a lot of time creating and managing the budget and that kind of thing. Is that not really the case?]

Tends not to be. Usually the elders would manage that and hiring, firing kinds of decisions. Sometimes ministers have direct input and then they have none.

Church of Christ 12 Y M

There is sort of these logistical, managerial source of tasks that ministers have some level of role to play with that. I think that's probably a point of friction among some ministers and critically those who are not—have a lot of organizational gifts or who see that maybe others are to or could do those kinds of things.

Presbyterian 11 Y F

Some pastors have the gift of administration. It doesn't sound like those that you've asked so far have felt that that was a gift.

[Interviewer: People say that it's a rare gift.]

It's a rare gift, yeah.

Presbyterian 03 N F

So part of being head of staff is managing his staff. That part of being head of staff is hiring the right people so you don't have to manage them that closely. [*Laughs*] And that requires a level of discernment, right? You gotta know that the person you hired to fix the place knows how to fix the place and isn't just there because he's deacon Wilda's great-grandson [*laughs*] and needed a summer gig. And similarly, especially with money that the people who are dealing with the finances of the church know what they are doing.

Well, the pastor ultimately is in charge of the calendar. Now the truth is that the session of the church, if it's a Presbyterian church or some other group, the church may govern the calendar. But the pastor usually sets most of the things on there.

Presbyterian 12 Y M

I think for Protestants, there aren't very many areas in the life of the church where you have a power that's not shared. My advice is: figure out what needs to be done, find somebody else who can do it better than you can, and cheer them on.

Methodist 02 N F

Consider the activities, it goes back to that vision. Work; so setting priorities, being realistic about budget.

Episcopal 06 Y F

But even if you're an associate you still have a domain of responsibilities that you have to—you've got to be—the priest has to be a self-starter. You've got to be able to run your own schedule, et cetera. So it does take a certain amount of gifts and discipline to do that. But self-differentiation comes into play too.

Episcopal 01 Y F

A lot of priests are afraid of administration, especially if they think they don't know much about money.

Again, it's taking care of the big frame of us instead of the fire that's burning in front of you. If you can get stuff in good health all over, you won't have as many fires. And the fires that you do have will be worthy ones instead of ridiculous crap. [*laughs*]

Lutheran 03 Y M

My general sense is there are a few pastors who do this very well. They're highly skilled in matters of organizational culture and very organized people themselves, have a good sense of how budgets work, but it's a relatively small group of people who come into congregational ministry with those kinds of skills or interests, really.

Lutheran 07 Y M

There are a few that are good at it, and there are a lot that aren't any good at it. [*Laughter*]

Church of Christ 05 N M

This theme that I think is the most challenging. Not that I'm saying this is the way it ought to be or anything; where again, it's similar to the preaching example I just gave you might have somebody who is really gifted, just not very organized; not very good at working with systemic structures.

Lutheran 03 Y M

I know there are some who are highly skilled at this. They're much more rare.

Lutheran 05 Y F

And so many seminaries, so many schools do not teach that, or think, "Oh, you'll get that later." Or "You'll just either do it well or won't." But I hear parishioners say, "Please, please, please teach our pastors about administration." And here it's just a joy to work with pastors who know that that's important and that it's a theological task. It's a ministry task.

Lutheran 07 Y M

I think so many pastors are not gifted in that area, and so struggle with it.

Cluster 3

Church of Christ 06 Y M

[Interviewer: Would you say that if I'm a pulpit minister of 120-member church, will I do more administration or less than if I was at a bigger church?]

Probably do more. Well, if the church is 1000, they may well have a full-time person doing it who is really the team leader, the Chief of Staff or whatever, and not the preaching minister. If it's 100, then probably the preaching minister is going to do a lot of the organization. The awkward size to me, or the—like the church I'm in now, 400 or 500, because really you expect the preaching minister to be the Chief of Staff person.

Church of Christ 08 Y M

[Interviewer: Would you say the end the Churches of Christ, ministers do a pretty good job by large of administration?]

Again, to say blanket—and blanket terms of they do well, I think that depends on region, size of congregation, church resources that are there because there some churches where the minister has to do everything anyway.

Church of Christ 08 Y M

I've seen it done well in larger churches whenever we been able to have maybe someone who is an executive minister is able to handle it ministration and then someone who is more of a preaching minister. Most of the time to leave minister has to function in both of those realms; to be a good administrator and a good spiritual leader.

Church of Christ 07 N M

That one seems to vary a lot by size. At the high end, you may have someone who is a lead pastor, an executive pastor kind of person who manages a huge staff at a mega-church. At a very small church, you may be in charge of everything too because you're it.

Probably in the medium churches, there's someone over a lot of the other different areas, maybe a worship minister and a children's minister and the campus minister. Then the lead minister, senior minister, is managing the staff.

Church of Christ 12 Y M

I think if you go to large churches you will find executive ministers. I'm working with a group of about 40, next Wednesday and Thursday of churches of 1000 are better. About 35 or 40 of those exact ministers in there making large policy decisions for 1000- and 2000-member churches. So a whole range of responses.

Church of Christ 11 Y M

I think that when you have that type of shift towards a CEO model, the minister then becomes the primary manager of the staff. That only works in large churches.

If there is one minister, I'm thinking about the church my wife's family attends, there is one—there is a preacher and he's it. So on a day-to-day basis he's not managing anybody except himself.

[Interviewer: So who is paying the bills and mundane things?]

I'm going to guess that in many traditional Churches of Christ, that falls to the lead minister. Though there might be some where they have a deacon who does that. So the deacon who is in charge of the building or the deacon—those are always deacon roles, the service roles. The deacon who is in charge of paying the bills and making sure that the lights are on when everybody shows up.

Church of Christ 01 N F

The church that we attend is considered really large by Church of Christ standards. Most congregations will have one full-time paid minister who is the preacher, and then has other pastoral care responsibilities, administrative responsibilities. Some congregations will be large enough to have maybe a senior minister and an associate position.

Methodist 03 Y F

I really do think that sometimes if you are the Lone Ranger, and you are without other resources in the congregation, that you really are fixing the toilets. That becomes part of the administration because there's no one else around to do it. Everybody else who could do it in your congregation is at work, so you have to take on all kinds of responsibilities.

Episcopal 06 Y F

So if you're the only priest in a medium-sized congregation you're going to be involved in quite a few activities around managing resources and all that. But in a larger congregation you're managing a staff and a team of professionals. And then in between you've got your lay folks. But I don't think it is the priest's job alone to manage the administrative tasks. The vestry is responsible for the material wellbeing of the congregation meaning money, personnel of—well the rector hires and fires all the staff but still in all there's—if you're smart there's collaboration. So some of it is leadership style.

But where I think it's an issue is that yes, that's the way we want it to be and in a lot of parishes there is a lot of shared responsibility but the buck stops with the rector, usually. And especially if there is problem. Because you've got to be paying attention to how it's going. But also the day-to-day business. Again, this person I was talking to yesterday, small congregation yet one of her issues is there's just a lot of detail work and there's nobody else to do it.

Cluster 4

Church of Christ 04 Y M

I would say that most ministers would say that it's a necessary evil, administration, and they don't like it. They hope they can delegate it away.

Presbyterian 03 N F

If you have a good team that can still be job three. If you do not have a good team, you cannot do ministry because you're too busy being an administrator.

Presbyterian 03 N F

But then you need a good person in charge of X, Y, and Z who are gonna carry it out. And you don't have to do it. And so it's having a staff and trusting your staff. Or having volunteers and trusting your volunteers, whatever it takes.

Presbyterian 12 Y M

But I think that—well, as a pastor, you've got to realize that there are certain things that other people in your congregation are going to do better than you do. Financial oversight, say; if you've got a C.P.A. who is willing to volunteer as church treasurer, let C.P.A. do the treasuring.

I think for Protestants, there aren't very many areas in the life of the church where you have a power that's not shared. My advice is: figure out what needs to be done, find somebody else who can do it better than you can, and cheer them on.

Methodist 03 Y F

So I think sometimes we need to hone our own administrative skills. We also need to have part of our discipling and work be equipping lay people to be involved with some of the administrative tasks. Admit where you can't do well and get the help.

Episcopal 06 Y F

And a lot of clergy want to be useful and helpful so they step in to get it done when in fact I think leadership means saying to people this isn't going to get done because there's nobody to do it. But then that's dangerous too because then people go well that's your job.

[Interviewer: Do you think you were unusual as a priest in saying no?]

I think I was better. There were times when I caved. Gotta have that bulletin for Holy Week. It's going to happen, or that funeral tomorrow.

Giving the work back to the people is one of his things. But it's hard to know whose work is it? That's the question you have to figure out. So sometimes the rector or the priest in charge is responsible.

Lutheran 03 Y M

I think what—some good models of ministry, in regard to administration, are in places where there are good lay administrators, people that this can be given to, either were paid to do it or who volunteered to do it, and provide really strong administrative leadership that the pastor, I would say, necessarily oversees and is responsible for but doesn't necessarily spend a lot of time on.

My sense would be that more pastors need to learn how to find those people and empower those people and make that kind of model work because that's not why they went into the ministry.

Lutheran 07 Y M

I think the best pastors who are terrible administrators are good at fostering administrative gifts, identifying people within the congregation who have those gifts, and then gathering those gifts together for the benefit of the whole.

Cluster 5

Church of Christ 05 N M

So there is almost a theological justification. We're going to be open to the Holy Spirit, all that kind of jazz. We don't want to type things out. We want spontaneity—whatever that means. Administration may be one area that's not been strength partly because of our DNA. Then add in now evangelicalism with a little charismatic element. We don't want written prayers although, sometimes we have that. So in terms of organization and administration, I would say that's probably not one of our strengths.

Church of Christ 07 N M

It depends on the way the elders are used to working with the previous minister, kind of an ecology of the congregation itself. I've seen some that have a high degree of influence and some have absolutely none. That is mainly due to how the elders are used to working and this is the way we've always done it.

Presbyterian 12 Y M

[Interviewer: So Methodist pastors tell people what to do in a way that Presbyterians don't?]

In certain areas in certain ways, Methodists can mandate things. Polity-wise, they don't have a shared power. In the Presbyterian church, the pastor and session are the governing body. Now, I think every Methodist church on the planet has a P.P.R. committee, and they have enough power that if a pastor makes them mad, they can get rid of him, sooner or later.

As a pastor have to realize that you are the leader of a volunteer organization, and there are certain things that you're responsible for. You just have to be honest about. And sometimes

that's saying, "No." First of all, somehow the administration of the church has to be a functional expression of the mission of the church. "This is what we want to be and do, and our administrative structures are there to enable us to be and do that."

Methodist 02 N F

Like my husband's really involved in prison ministry, so which are the congregations that can support that across so that it's not all on one congregation? But that takes time and building relationships, and sometimes in the United Methodist appointment system, that's not as possible. People are quickly moved up and out.

Episcopal 02 N M

So administration is about certain modes of power at work. So how are you doing that? How are you empowering people in your midst? Do you properly understand your own power as a priest? I think it's a tricky one for our graduates, a lot of our priests, to figure out how to own the right kind of authority in that administrative role, whether it's with a vestry or working on a budget.

Episcopal 06 Y F

Our canons and our history have always emphasized lay participation in governments and ministry.

Databank

Leading

These texts come from a study about what seminary professors imagine that it is like to be a minister serving a congregation (Lincoln 2020). Responses come from professors at five different seminaries, identified here by the denomination or fellowship of the school with which he or she is affiliated. Each participant is uniquely categorized by an identifier comprising three parts: the name of the denomination, an arbitrary participant number, a letter N or Y and, finally the letter F or M. The N or Y refer to whether the individual ever was a full-time minister or priest serving a congregation. The F or M refers to female or male. Thus the participant called CHURCH OF CHRIST 01 N F is a female faculty member at a Church of Christ school who has never served as a minister in a congregation full-time.

Text spoken by one person has been divided into smaller pieces that focus on one idea. Thus, the same participant shows up in several places in this compilation, which was made using Dedoose software and downloaded into a word processing file. All of these texts were spoken as responses to the open-ended question "Tell me about leading, defined as the way that ministers or priests discover a vision for God's work in their communities, and motivate members to strive towards it." Things that the interviewer said are placed in brackets.

To aid those just learning how to code data, I arranged these texts into several clusters.

The document Check Your Coding *lists the subthemes of "Leading" that I identified in this set of data. What subthemes do you find? What happens to your analysis when you use the characteristics of respondents to pull together ideas from, for example, only women or only men?*

Cluster 1

CHURCH OF CHRIST 01 N F

I think that ministers really struggle in terms of whether they certainly have their own vision for how God is at work in the world. They have their own motivations for being a part of that or they wouldn't go into leadership ministry if they didn't have that.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 10 N F

When a leader—when a minister is developing a vision for God's work in a particular community set within a certain city or context, that they are attending to their tradition, to the history of their particular people, and how it relates to the larger mission of God in the world and also attending to the Lord in prayer and connected with the particular community and culture and their church and how their members are engaged in that culture, their particular strengths and weaknesses and struggles. I think that those things. . . when that minister has attended to those things, they develop a kind of a vision for what God's work is and that particular place connected to, centrally to the gospel and also their place and time and how they are trained to communicate that and how they would like their whole community to work together to be God's people in their place.

[Interviewer: Do you think that the notion that what I discerned here at Third Street Church of Christ, we should be doing is different from what they should be doing across town? Do you think that that is an odd notion? That there is sort of this niche kind of approach?]

For our policy, that it is common for churches to do this because of our congregational model. It is common for churches to feel we have particular giftings and this particular area and we will focus our ministry here. That might be different from what the church on the other side of town decides to do with their particular gifts, sort of thing.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 05 N M

Historically, this would not have been as important. I would say, currently, this probably is becoming more of a focus, especially the idea that God has a plan and that we need to pray, be open to the direction of the Holy Spirit, things like that.

PRESBYTERIAN 11 Y F

I think pastors do that best by paying attention to larger cultural trends, by going to conferences and being in dialogue with other pastors and other religious leaders to have an open mind for change. And to continually be in prayer and reading of Scripture for their own personal life, for seeing, "Okay, where is God leading us now?"

PRESBYTERIAN 03 N F

It is the pastor's job first, going back to equipping and caring, to help folks call to those positions, folks who have vision. And then to listen collectively with them for where the spirit seems to be leading the church. This is where the pastor needs to be grounded in scripture and prayer because if the pastor is grounded in scripture and prayer and paying attention around the world, there's plenty of things the church needs to be doing. [*Laughs*] And knowing where their particular congregation is and what their gifts and graces are and what their weaknesses are should, again getting back to knowing being job one, help pastors to discern with council ideally.

And I do really mean—even for churches in which it's a solo pastor, council is critical here even if you just pull aside senior members of the church and say this is what I'm thinking, what do you think? But with council to discern where next to go, how next to live into faithful discipleship. What's the next thing we need to be doing to be faithful?

And what are those places that we don't want to see that we really do need to see? Like, the neighborhood has changed and we haven't. [*Laughs*] Like, we're older than we used to be, and we're not attracting younger people. Like, we've so put a premium in young people that we stopped calling our seniors to ministry. Like, we really need to tend to this building, and this building really is falling down around us. And if it were gonna be of any place in the community, we either need to decide what we're gonna do with this building one way or another. And that may also mean leading the church to close and say this part of our ministry's done, we need to reconvene someplace else. And those are difficult places to go.

PRESBYTERIAN 12 Y M

So what do pastors do in that? Well, you do a lot of teaching, you do a lot of nudging, you may call in a favor or two. But I think that if you do not have the consensus, if you cannot build the consensus, whatever ministry it is that you're pushing is going to fail.

METHODIST 02 N F

I think this discovery of vision gets more at it, because there, there's some kinds of listening and reflection, discernment, encouragement. It seems more collaborative.

[Interviewer: It's not, "I'm the pastor, and we're gonna do this."]

METHODIST 01 Y M

I think the pastoral leader has to have her own convictions and her own vision, but she also needs to be able to listen to the congregation and elicit from them what resonates with them. Because you gotta have buy-in, or it's not worth anything, right? So that capacity to listen deeply and understand what's going on with people is really important.

EPISCOPAL 06 Y F

I think we've gotten—at least the Episcopal Church gets into trouble—and clergy, I don't know if you're familiar with the Dry Velvet about effective and struggling clergy but it's sort of the people who see the priestly role is I'm going to take care of you and it's all about pastoral care, they're not as successful. Or it's all about having good liturgy, they're more struggling. The more

effective clergy take the collective view, the corporate view are a little more disciplined around the mission of the church, I think.

EPISCOPAL 01 Y F

Whether it's liturgy or outreach ministry. We are always asking: what's God doing here? How can we use this particular thing, like liturgy, to help us answer our call at [address of church building]. It's very much a call in context, and how does this fit.

[Interviewer: does this happen in most smaller parishes, too?]

It should. [*laughs*] That's how I teach.

What's bedrock for congregations is their understanding of their particular call in the context of what's God doing in the whole, what's our piece. Whether you are a tiny or huge congregation, that's the basic question.

EPISCOPAL 01 Y F

We should think about that in advance. For instance, vestry meetings are an opportunity for the leadership to think clearly: what is God calling us to? On the ground, what things do we need to make that happen?

METHODIST 01 Y M

In terms of leadership taking the vocation of laity seriously, and with our theological training, we have a lot of preconceived ideas about what things mean. But to find out what, in people's own words, church means to them, especially in the Lutheran tradition, which is heavily doctrinal tradition. Some of the doctrinal stuff doesn't play with people very well, and yet pastors can assume, because our identity is shaped around that, that that's really important to them. It may not be. So to really be open to hearing what matters to people; I think that's an important part of leadership.

LUTHERAN 02 Y M

When it comes to discovering a vision for God's work in their community it is the privilege and responsibility of the pastor. It's the work of the pastor but not the pastor alone. I think it really—I think that if a community, if a congregation is going to discover, truly discover, to unearth the vision that God has for that particular place and that particular people, especially in relationship to a larger community, then it needs to be communal work, it needs to be communal discernment. I think oftentimes the mistake that's made is that it's—when it comes to language of discovering of vision—discover—I see discovering a lot better than generating even.

Generating is a good word but discovering means it's not mine and it's not ours, it's God's, and we need to discover it, we need to unearth it, to excavate. So the discernment process is really a process of like discovering who are we really here? Like, for instance, if you're a Lutheran. . . St. John's right outside of Minot, you know, what does it mean to be Lutheran first now in this time and place, what does it mean to be Lutheran here, what does it mean to be here?

CHURCH OF CHRIST 10 N F

So I think it's from that discipline of attending the various things with a kind of prayerful consideration of those things that the minister develops a vision and tries to encourage members to take that vision on as a part of their calling together to be the people of God in a particular place.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 04 Y M

When I was a preacher, people would ask me what my—however they would ask the energy question. What is my stick? What am I bringing? What programs do I have?

Churches do look for that kind of programming and stuff. I've always answered, I don't know. I'm wanting to come in to the congregation and listen, do some ethnography work. How is God calling this church to be in this community? Let's get to know your narrative. Let's get to know the community's narrative. Let me—let's work on this together. To me it's more of a communal leadership and learning to follow maybe the leadership of God as we move to a place.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 06 Y M

I can think examples of ministers who are—well, the question says, discovering a vision for God's work in their communities. I think really are striving to be much more deeply engaged in communities. Church of Christ, for a long time we were kind of a sectarian community that said we are the ones, we're right and our job is to go persuade everybody that we are right, and the righteous ones will come in and the unrighteous ones will stay out. I don't think very many people believe any of that anymore and in fact, they're pretty embarrassed about it all. What that's meant is being forced to rediscover how to lead in a community.

LUTHERAN 02 Y M

I think one of the mistakes that's often made is that—to think that vision belongs to the pastor. It's like that's why we have a pastor, especially in a larger church. It's like, well, that's what the senior pastor's for; that's her job, that's his job.

I think that pastors are involved in that but what it really means is gathering a cadre of individuals, of persons from a congregation who have a sense of gift and passion for that kind of work and committing to really what's an ongoing process of communal discernment,

[Interviewer: The pastor needs to be involved, can't be a soloist.]

Correct. They have to be integrally involved, but not a one-woman or one-man show.

Cluster 2

CHURCH OF CHRIST 01 N F

I'm sure there are bigger concerns at play, but a lot of it was his vision for ministry, his vision for how God was calling that congregation and the ways that he went about trying to implement

that vision and implement that calling in the life of the congregation was not shared by the elders of that church, nor was it shared by the larger congregation.

And a few members of that congregation came on board with that minister and said, "Yes. This is what we want and this is where we're going." But a much larger contingent of the elders and older members of the congregation did not.

I lay a lot of it at the feet of the eldership in terms of not really clearly articulating, "This is our vision. This is the shared, the church's vision." Whether they didn't have one, didn't know they were supposed to have one, or whether they thought, "Well, that's the minister's job." And then when the minister's vision doesn't wind up matching with what they would like, then you're darned if you do and darned if you don't.

A lot of it was about outreach ministry, that the—and again, it's a bigger, I know there's bigger issues at stake there. But when the church was growing and the minister got fired. And I think a lot of it was about this minister's vision for outreach, vision for bringing in new people to the congregation, bringing in young families. So newly married or married with children kind of folks to a congregation that was typically pretty gray-haired and in decline. [*Laughter*]

So and yet the threat that came along with that to the more established lifetime members of the congregation who remember building the building and remember their parents did this and that to establish the church. And so for these newcomers to come in and be so enthusiastic, and be growing, and be, you know, the adult Bible classes were expanding. And to view that as a threat rather than view that as a blessing. To view that as God is at work in our church. Isn't that great? But instead were threatened by that.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 08 Y M

I think that preachers also have a sense of what God might be doing in the world and they might want to keep that connection strong between what's going on in a church and what God might be doing in that church and in the neighborhood and the city that is located in. Those are things that I think are going on inside the preacher and preaching.

More often, I see ministers that are ready to be a leader or be the leader and have a clear picture in their mind of what that looks like. Usually it's a take-charge person, a CEO type, who is—knows where the promised land is and this is dragging people along towards that end. I don't myself find that a healthy approach to leadership because what I think a group of people might need to do might be the exact opposite of what they need to do or what they see as God's call for their life. Again, it's a place where ministers can sometimes use people for their own ends rather than nurture until the late and guests that are there are the actual gifts that are there.

Where I'm going with this is sometimes you need a leader to draw people in and say, "All right. Here's what we need to do. Everyone wants to—they want to complete task and this is what we're going to need. We need this group to the this. This group to do that." So leadership is necessary. It doesn't have to be a steamroll job.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 05 N M

We have particular elders, leaders who are opinion leaders, who orchestrate those discussions and then there may be, with the leadership including elders and the preacher, minister, there may be educational processes where you have some experts come in and present what they think on the various topics whether it's gender—gender inclusion would be one that's come up. Instrumental music, there are churches now that are instrumental in terms of worship.

So the mechanisms are somewhat democratic.

PRESBYTERIAN 03 N F

And I do really mean—even for churches in which it's a solo pastor, council is critical here even if you just pull aside senior members of the church and say this is what I'm thinking, what do you think? But with council to discern where next to go, how next to live into faithful discipleship. What's the next thing we need to be doing to be faithful?

PRESBYTERIAN 12 Y M

I've known a lot of pastors who got into trouble by being overly autocratic. I think a lot of pastoral leadership depends on consensus-building, and if you as a pastor have a strong feeling that the church should be involved in X ministry, the way that you lead them into that is find the people who care about it, and equip them, and let them be the autocrats.

METHODIST 03 Y F

Here's where I feel a disconnect with students that I know, and with some pastors. I buy into idea that pastors are visionary, and they are leaders. The disconnect comes when my students say, "I'd love to do that," or they get really inspired by a course. Like it might be "A Theology of Ecology," or it might be a "Prophetic Ministry" course, and they're ready to go be visionary, and lead, and start the revolutions. And their congregations put the brakes on because they come in too hard and fast.

To coerce or mandate certain kinds of visions probably will fail. But I really believe if I go in a congregation and speak authentically from my heart, and in my own life make choices that are visionary.

That if I talk about it not so much as, "Here's what you should be doing," but "These are the theological and Biblical reasons that I'm doing this, and I feel like I have to do it, because when I pray and I listen to what God is calling me to do, I've got to be a part of X. I've got to go to Ferguson in March." Or "I really feel that it would be good for the church if we invited in this nonprofit group to share our space. We're not using the third floor of the church. Why not have this group that helps to find employment for the poor be there?"

METHODIST 02 N F

I think this discovery of vision gets more at it, because there, there's some kinds of listening and reflection, discernment, encouragement. It seems more collaborative. It's not, "I'm the pastor, and we're gonna do this."

METHODIST 01 Y M

I think the pastoral leader has to have her own convictions and her own vision, but she also needs to be able to listen to the congregation and elicit from them what resonates with them. Because you gotta have buy-in, or it's not worth anything, right? So that capacity to listen deeply and understand what's going on with people is really, really important.

EPISCOPAL 01 Y F

We should think about that in advance. For instance, vestry meetings are an opportunity for the leadership to think clearly: what is God calling us to? On the ground, what things do we need to make that happen?

Priests think that by preaching and teaching, they will get people to reach out. I don't think it works that way, but that's what they think.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 01 N F

The struggle, I think, comes when a minister comes into a setting, a congregational setting, and their vision does not match the church's vision, whether the church really has no vision, doesn't really understand what they're about other than well, we get together on Sunday mornings, and that's what we do, and we have a minister who preaches to us, and that's what they do.

And they really don't have that understanding of how God's at work in the larger world and how their faith impacts the rest of their life. And so or they have a sense of that vision, a sense of that ministry, and the minister who is coming in doesn't share that, or his vision or her vision is at variance with that vision.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 10 N F

So some may lead from the front so to speak and model a certain way of living and being and embodying the gospel for the congregation or there may be a way of encouraging people from a more kind of one-on-one pastoral sort of way by being involved in their lives and seeing ways in which those central. . . Their central vision of the gospel in the committee, how that annex with the aspects of their personals lives I suppose.

Then also, there might be ministers who—well, I would think that all of those things working together would also turn up in the way that they speak and teach from the pulpit in classes and when people are discerning together, reflecting together.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 05 N M

[Interviewer: Do you want to say anything more about, how a minister teases out and works with folk to discern that vision for God's work?]

I've actually doing this on particular issues. For example, gender inclusion. There is clearly the idea that we want to be open to what God thinks about that, but the mechanisms, the social processes, typically are something like: let's have group discussions where we break up members of the congregation into classes.

PRESBYTERIAN 12 Y M

But it's a theme in almost everything I've said: you've got to do a lot of consensus-building, and you have to realize that volunteers are not employees.

LUTHERAN 02 Y M

It is about generating a shortlist of prompts or cues or clues that might help us get a sense of direction, and then once you're able to identify them, like the process we did yesterday where you're trying in some ways to kind of thematize them or categorize them so you've got something to work with, then it—for me, it's really about then releasing that even more to the people.

LUTHERAN 02 Y M

But somebody has to lead, somebody has to take the lead and create—help create an environment in which, again, people who are gifted for the ministry of caring are able to do that.

Cluster 3

CHURCH OF CHRIST 04 Y M

I think that most ministers and Churches of Christ would fall into two camps. I think that the one camp, more of what our DNA, more the tradition would be is, I lead by teaching and that teaching is the prominent way in which I lead this church. I inform the church about what it means to be the church that God called. So we are restoring the New Testament church so let us have all the information that we can restore the New Testament church and its structures or organization here in this place. So that's what's primarily done.

But the others, group, would—I would say little bit more of a progressive group is—without saying it officially, and publicly would not stay it officially, is changing the relationship between the minister and the congregation. And our tradition it's an elder-led, congregationally discerned who the elders are, and then the minister is not a hireling, but is often probably thought of as a hireling, but definitely in submission to those elders.

In my own teaching I would want to teach that as more of a partnership relationship, a collaborative relationship. I think that is a healthier model. I would say that the more progressive churches are moving more towards of a Baptist model where the pastor is leading the church in that it's more of an executive leadership and more of a CEO model. So language that we would've heard 20 years ago at all; senior pastor, senior evangelist, or senior preacher.

At Highland, where I worship, we now have an executive minister. That executive minister role is growing. That is this—without being theologically driven, it's being more driven by more of a utilitarian approach that the minister is becoming the lead pastor. Although, we're still reticent to use the word pastor.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 06 Y M

But it's particular true in a free church kind of polity, that ministers really have to lead through example and persuasion.

So I think there are a lot of ministers leading that way through creative forms of ministry that again, aren't glamorous, but make a difference. Whether it's community gardens or work in public schools.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 08 Y M

> More often, I see ministers that are ready to be a leader or be the leader and have a clear picture in their mind of what that looks like. Usually it's a take-charge person, a CEO type, who is—knows where the promise land is and this is dragging people along towards that end. I don't myself find that a healthy approach to leadership because what I think a group of people might need to do might be the exact opposite of what they need to do or what they see as God's call for their life. Again, it's a place where ministers can sometimes use people for their own ends rather than nurture until the late and guests that are there are the actual gifts that are there.
>
> Sometimes leadership is providing that organization that people don't have even though they have a want to accomplish something, but they need someone that pulls them together.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 12 Y M

> They would say their leading has to do with helping that's I got to be careful because again, I'm aspirationally getting it is, but I—to work with—to work collegially or collaboratively with lay leader, boards, groups, elderships, elder leader groups, to a collaborative form of vision and then help to initiate that vision and to communicate that vision.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 10 N F

> So some may lead from the front so to speak and model a certain way of living and being and embodying the gospel for the congregation or there may be a way of encouraging people from a more kind of one-on-one pastoral sort of way by being involved in their lives and seeing ways in which those central. . . Their central vision of the gospel in the committee, how that annex with the aspects of their personals lives I suppose.
>
> Then also, there might be ministers who—well, I would think that all of those things working together would also turn up in the way that they speak and teach from the pulpit in classes and when people are discerning together, reflecting together.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 11 Y M

> I think more than—more often than not, it's more a CEO kind of thing. The leader of the ministry team who sets vision, maybe direction, and in some way, paralleling maybe some other denominations.
>
> But leadership is a very important role of the pastor, but it's often a kind of leadership that's different than corporate leadership, or other forms of leadership.
>
> So sometimes we're equipping just by example, and the nature of having someone who looks like you be up in leadership is something that can empower and equip.

PRESBYTERIAN 12 Y M

> I've known a lot of pastors who got into trouble by being overly autocratic. I think a lot of pastoral leadership depends on consensus-building, and if you as a pastor have a strong feeling that the church should be involved in X ministry, the way that you lead them into that is find the people who care about it, and equip them, and let them be the autocrats.

METHODIST 03 Y F

I do know some pastors who assume that all power, authority, action are centralized in the pastor. And I find those to be very lonely pastors, who often are burned out, because they're not willing to share power.

EPISCOPAL 06 Y F

Deanna Harrison is the bishop here did a leadership talk with our students and I liked what she said. She said look, if you want to be prophet first you have to be a pastor. Because if you don't have—it's sort of moral capital—but if you don't have that relationship of trust that's built up by being with people in the everyday of their lives and their troubles, then why should they listen to you when you're asking them to do big things?

Cluster 4

CHURCH OF CHRIST 06 Y M

This is another place where it's a difficult thing to talk about in Churches of Christ because with the radical congregational polity, it's kind of a radical emphasis on lay leadership which means that sometimes we call people to lead and then we don't let them do it. We do whatever we can to check them up along the way. We want you to lead, just don't let anybody catch you doing it.

What's different is the way it relates to lay leadership and the games we play. Everybody plays games. Our particular games are to pretend the person is not really leading when in fact he or she is.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 12 Y M

What we hear from lay leaders is, you folks in the seminary need to make sure people you're sending us to be our ministers have good leadership gifts because they think all it's all about is just reaching which reflects our tradition.

[Interviewer: So, historically, it's not been what Churches of Christ ministers did.]

That's right. The notion was that was clearly lay leader's role, we called elder teams or elderships, elder groups. The preacher's role was to preach and to—in the old days it comes out of a conversionist evangelistic, that you're supposed to go out and save people; bring them to Jesus. Even in the leadership structures in congregations, many congregations of Churches of Christ, we don't quite know what to do with the minister.

Our founding Presbyterian forebears, Thomas Campbell, or Alexander Campbell would write that there are three offices in the church. There's elders, there's deacons, and as evangelists and the elders are the pastoral leaders of the church. The deacons take care of administration [*several words unclear*]. The evangelist goes and starts new churches and appoint elders and then goes on. There was no role for the teaching elder in the Presbyterian tradition.

The evangelists were itinerant. So when the churches began to develop within what came to be Christian churches and Churches of Christ, there was no place for the full-time clergy. The

elder, the way I read it, would—the shepherd, who comes from outside the congregation is appointed or ordained to join with shepherds from inside the congregation, the ruling elders. Together, some sort of joint leadership of the congregation, which is my badly, butchered understanding of some thought about Presbyterian governance. So I should be saying that to you out of a Presbyterian seminary.

We pulled that out and we just had lay elders and we got rid of the professional clergy. It's only been in the last—because there was no place for one. I think Campbell and others in our movement recognized the error of their ways, but the die was set. So ever since then, the professional clergy has been trying to creep back into the system and find a place. That's part of the real crisis that Churches of Christ face.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 11 Y M

So the minister is leader, the minister, not as possessing independent authority, but the minister as possessing a special kind of authority.

PRESBYTERIAN 11 Y F

But leadership is a very important role of the pastor, but it's often a kind of leadership that's different than corporate leadership, or other forms of leadership.

METHODIST 03 Y F

Here's where I feel a disconnect with students and some pastors. I buy into idea that pastors are visionary, and they are leaders. The disconnect comes when my students say, "I'd love to do that," or they get really inspired by a course. Like it might be "A Theology of Ecology," or it might be a "Prophetic Ministry" course, and they're ready to go be visionary, and lead, and start the revolutions. And their congregations put the brakes on because they come in too hard and fast.

METHODIST 01 Y M

But also to have some vision of what's important here, right? We can major in minors, and that doesn't serve us well. So being able to think about where do I, as pastor, need to put my energy? Where does the congregation need to put its energy to do things that matter, and not just things that we may have been doing for a while, but may not carry as much significance as they did?

LUTHERAN 07 Y M

I think there's a pressure that exists in our culture to have measurable results, which is not untrue of parish ministry, [*Laughter*] either. So I think lots of pastors experience leading in terms of measurable results, what numbers they're going to put on the paper, whether they're reporting to their councils or to the national church or senate. So when I think about that, I think that's a pressure which is the pressure from the world being applied in the church.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 01 N F

The struggle, I think, comes when a minister comes into a setting, a congregational setting, and their vision does not match the church's vision, whether the church really has no vision, doesn't really understand what they're about other than well, we get together on Sunday mornings, and that's what we do, and we have a minister who preaches to us, and that's what they do.

And they really don't have that understanding of how God's at work in the larger world and how their faith impacts the rest of their life. And so or they have a sense of that vision, a sense of that ministry, and the minister who is coming in doesn't share that, or his vision or her vision is at variance with that vision.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 12 Y M

A lot of our people who come through our schools or our seminary, I think have some level of ambivalence about leading. They just want to go pastor and teach. They don't—this notion about leading is rather ambiguous to them.

[Interviewer: So what do those congregants want?]

I think it's probably been more an initiator of ideas. Of course what happens when pastors do that is they sometimes get sideways with boards, but they still want that.

PRESBYTERIAN 12 Y M

A lot of times when a pastor comes up with a great idea—sometimes it was me—and the response was, "Oh, we tried that 20 years ago, and it didn't work."

Cluster 5

CHURCH OF CHRIST 11 Y M

I think of Highland where the elders have, not anointed our lead minister, but in some significant way, and maybe this still shows that the authority rests with the elders, handed over these responsibilities. So I do think that that's a trend. That leaders, lead ministers, or more and more seen themselves as possessing either a semiautonomous authority, independent, somewhat independent authority, or even a higher type of authority in a congregation over the elders and over the ministry staff.

Coming from like a family systems perspective, it's often hard for one person to tell a whole bunch of other people what to do. That kind of leadership is often not very effective in just being able to have one person say, "This is the direction we're all going from." But rather, it helps more when leaders are differentiated and take I stands—you know, "This is what I see"—and to build a kind of consensus by letting other people see it, too—see what the leader sees.

PRESBYTERIAN 03 N F

The job of leading is not done alone in some of the more denominational churches. In the Presbyterian church, the job of leading is the job of the session and the pastor together. In the Methodist church, it is the job of the pastor parish committee and the pastor together. It's never just the pastor making these decisions. It's not an autocracy.

And I do really mean—even for churches in which it's a solo pastor, council is critical here even if you just pull aside senior members of the church and say this is what I'm thinking, what do you think? But with council to discern where next to go, how next to live into faithful discipleship. What's the next thing we need to be doing to be faithful?

And that's why I don't think a pastor should do that by themselves which gets back to number one, knowing your members and loving your members because unless you have good council around you, you will break your church apart trying to do this by yourself.

PRESBYTERIAN 12 Y M

I've known a lot of pastors who got into trouble by being overly autocratic. I think a lot of pastoral leadership depends on consensus-building, and if you as a pastor have a strong feeling that the church should be involved in X ministry, the way that you lead them into that is find the people who care about it, and equip them, and let them be the autocrats.

METHODIST 03 Y F

So I think here is where relational skills are really important. If you have a vision, I would like my students to be thinking about how that vision should emerge from the community rather than from an individual. So I see leadership, really strong pastoral leadership, as tied in with what the congregation is doing, and thinking, and feeling.

METHODIST 02 N F

I think this discovery of vision gets more at it, because there, there's some kinds of listening and reflection, discernment, encouragement. It seems more collaborative.

[Interviewer: It's not, "I'm the pastor, and we're gonna do this."]

EPISCOPAL 01 Y F

Whether it's liturgy or outreach ministry, we are always asking: what's God doing here? How can we use this particular thing, like liturgy, to help us answer our call at [address of church building]. It's very much a call in context, and how does this fit.

We should think about that in advance. For instance, vestry meetings are an opportunity for the leadership to think clearly: what is God calling us to? On the ground, what things do we need to make that happen?

METHODIST 01 Y M

I don't think in general, in pastoral ministry, congregations or judicatories know how to both nurture and hold accountable pastors, and that's pretty crucial to being healthy and being faithful and having a good sense of pastoral identity.

LUTHERAN 02 Y M

When it comes to discovering a vision for God's work in their community it is the privilege and responsibility of the pastor. It's the work of the pastor but not the pastor alone.

So there's a way in which we ask—maybe we're called somehow to have a ministry that connects with the—then you ask, who's interested in that, who has a passion for that, who has a gift for that, who has connections? You start to give it away to more teams, to more groups of people. In my estimation, it very much is based on gift and passion.

You identify people who are willing to take it and run with it. It's a permission-giving model. You know, it's really about bless and release.

LUTHERAN 07 Y M

Leadership in the context of a congregation, lots of healthy pastors are able to bring out the best in their membership or among the parishioners. The pastor doesn't have the be the expert in everything, so they foster a culture of both naming and bringing out the gifts within the congregation in order to lead most effectively.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 04 Y M

When I was a preacher, people would ask what is my stick? What am I bringing? What programs do I have? Churches look for that kind of programming. I've always answered, I don't know. I want to come in to the congregation and listen, do some ethnography work. How is God calling this church to be in this community? Let's get to know your narrative. Let's get to know the community's narrative. Let's work on this together. To me it's more of a communal leadership and learning to follow maybe the leadership of God as we move to a place.

In my own teaching I would want to teach that as more of a partnership relationship, a collaborative relationship. I think that is a healthier model.

Cluster 6

EPISCOPAL 04 N M

It's the pastor that you feel safe calling in the darkest, scariest moment, that is the one that's most present, and the one you're going to be able to trust to say, how are we going to put the Sunday school class together? How are we going to get this program going? What mission opportunities should we engage in? Oh, you want to have a Bluegrass Sunday? I've come to trust you. Let's try it.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 06 Y M

[Interviewer: What set of skills do those who do it well demonstrate?]

I think those with skills of imagination and deep engagement with people's lives. These are leadership skills.

LUTHERAN 10 Y M

Pastors who are aware of what's happening in the community and shows that awareness, particularly in preaching and in the prayers. Let me say something about prayers. It's a fascinating thing to be part of the congregation praying and saying, "Amen," or, "Lord, hear our prayer," to a petition that shows a striking sense of, "Boy, pastor was out and about or is keeping up with the situation and brings it before the congregation in a petition that you feel moved to say, 'Lord, hear our prayer.'" And that's critical.

[Interviewer: Would that be something like praying for a member by name?]

Praying for a member by name. Let's say also there is a connection out there between the member that you know and others.

I'm confident that the leadership of the pastor for those whose leadership is really healthy is rooted in Word and sacrament, to use Lutheran language. So that their primary job is to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments according to the gospel in such a way that they trust that the Word is active and doing stuff in people's lives. Right? So I would put the gospel at the heart of leadership in terms of parish ministry. And sort of the pressure about measurable results, I think is something that challenges that reality about parish life, [*Laughter*] parish ministry, because you can get seduced into wanting to have yielded, or results that yield numbers and measurable things, which the gospel doesn't always work that way.

Databank

Check Your Coding

Here are the subthemes that I identified for the seven compilations of themes in the Databank. A discussion of themes from the collection "Overarching Message" is found in chapter 8.

Call to Ministry: Intuition; Slowly Developing Calls; Sudden/Trigger; Affirmed by Others; Changes in Understanding

Transformation: Knowledge; Need for Openness; Professional Skills; Personal Growth; Supportive People; Calling; God

Life Management: Time; Importance of Self-care; Balancing Commitments

Emotions: Positive Emotions; Frustrations; Roller Coaster

Pastoral Identity: Ideal Roles; Falling Short of the Ideal; Actual Roles; Authority in Pastoral Ministry

Administration: Importance of Administration; The Minister's Skills; Congregational Size Affects Administration; Administration as a Shared Task; Limits of Church Structure on Administration

Leading: Discovering a Vision; Sharing a Common Vision; Leadership Styles; Challenges to Being a Leader; Sharing Leadership; Earning Trust

Qualitative research helps investigators better understand the experiences of others. Qualitative Research: A Field Manual For Ministry Students assumes no prior background in research involving human subjects. The examples and exercises in this book are drawn from variety of ministry settings and religious communities. The book addresses the distinctive features of final projects in Doctor of Ministry programs, including how to evaluate a project's success. Some research methods textbooks discuss theory in depth but provide little explanation about how to conduct a study. This book explains how to use specific techniques and procedures, from study design and recruitment of participants to collection of data, analysis (coding), and interpretation of findings. Included is a databank containing transcribed interviews from qualitative studies. These data can be used to practice the analysis techniques discussed in the book.

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